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\$3.50  
Winter '86-'87

A MAGAZINE OF RADICAL FILM CRITICISM & THEORY

No. 7



**S T A R S**

**MINNELLI TRIBUTE • GAY FILMS • TAVERNIER INTERVIEW**



# CineAction!

## No. 7, December 1986

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TYPESETTING: Excalibur Publications

PRINTING: Delta Web Graphics

*Stills courtesy of the Ontario Film Institute,  
Warner Brothers, Cineplex Odeon, Ltd., and  
the individual authors.*

*CineAction!* is published quarterly by the  
CineAction! collective. Single copy price is  
\$3.50; double issues \$7.00; subscriptions  
are available for four issues for \$12.00  
(individuals) and \$25.00 (institutions);  
abroad, add \$5.00 for airmail.

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ISSN 0826-9866  
Second Class Mail Register No. 7057  
Printed and bound in Canada

This issue was assisted by grants from the  
Explorations programme and the Writing  
and Publication Section of the Canada  
Council.

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## Contents

From the editors Page 1  
FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ & RICHARD LIPPE

### Stars

Kim Novak: A Resistance to Definition Page 4  
RICHARD LIPPE

Joan Bennett: Images of Femininity in Conflict Page 22  
FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ

Cary Grant: Comedy and Male Desire Page 36  
ANDREW BRITTON

'the superstar story' Page 52  
GLORIA BERLIN & BRYAN BRUCE

### Interview

The Survival of Mise-en-scène:  
An Interview with Bernard Tavernier Page 64  
FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ, RICHARD LIPPE & ROBIN WOOD

### Minnelli Tribute

Minnelli's *Madame Bovary* Page 74  
ROBIN WOOD

### Gay Films

Gay Visibility: Contemporary Images Page 81  
RICHARD LIPPE

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*Front Cover: Kim Novak*





The quintessential star: Greta Garbo.

## Editorial

THE PUBLICATION of Richard Dyer's *Stars* (BFI, 1979) opened up the theoretical investigation of star images. Although Dyer's book has stimulated a critical interest in the star phenomenon, very few rigorous analyses have been produced since its inception; of these, the most notable is Andrew Britton's exemplary study, *Katharine Hepburn: the Thirties and After* (Tyneside Press, 1984). As this rich and complex area of film study remains virtually unexplored, we have centred this issue of *CineAction!* on stars, focusing on mainstream star personas and also those of Andy Warhol's 1960s avant-garde films. Although a star's image is primarily constructed through his or her filmic appearances, the star portrait is one aspect of the marketing of a star image circulating within a network of off-screen publicity and on-screen presence. Recently, there has been a proliferation

of star portrait books featuring photographs of classical Hollywood stars ranging from the extravagant *Marlene Dietrich—Portraits 1926-1960* (Grove Press, Inc., 1984) to the less lavishly produced John Kobal series. While the fascination with Hollywood glamour portraits has been popular since the 1960s mainly for nostalgia purposes, these photographs can be used to gain an understanding of the construction of a star persona as well as insights into gender expectations; additionally, these photographs speak of the broader social context in which they were produced. With this in mind, we are offering a brief analysis of a 1946 Rita Hayworth publicity photograph at the conclusion of our introduction.

This past September at the 1986 Toronto Festival of Festivals we had the privilege to interview the critic-director Bertrand Tavernier,



who has produced an impressive body of work in the last 15 years. His films, in the narrative Realist mode, indicate how the format can be used to give a political perspective to social realities at large. We would like to thank Bertrand Tavernier for graciously agreeing to a lengthy interview and for his genuine enthusiasm and co-operation.

We are also including a piece on Vincente Minnelli's *Madame Bovary* (1949) as a tribute to this underrated filmmaker who has yet to receive full recognition for his achievements. For instance, Peter Wollen in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) makes several provocative comments about Minnelli's films in his introduction but then ranks the director as a *metteur en scène*. On the other hand, Wollen, using a 'structural approach,' argues that Howard Hawks and John Ford are auteurs; but the structural strength Wollen perceives in their work is also present in Minnelli's films. In fact, the structural schema Wollen detects in Hawks' films could be applied to Minnelli's films with the musicals and melodramas having a similar interrelation to that of Hawks' dramatic adventure films and the crazy comedies.

As Robin Wood notes in his article, many critics have acclaimed Minnelli as a great stylist but, too often, the identification has been used as a means to dismiss his films from the critical attention they deserve. Minnelli has been repeatedly characterized as an aesthete whose films display style for its own sake; but, to the contrary, the major films rigorously integrate, as Wood superbly illustrates in his analysis of *Madame Bovary*, style and content. Undoubtedly, Minnelli's work has suffered in a culture committed to male dominance and masculinity: his sensibility is markedly 'feminine.' In this respect, Minnelli shares an affinity with Max Ophüls who also was mis-evaluated and only recently has received the critical recognition he deserves. With all the work done on gender construction in the last decade we can perhaps cease to equate feminine with inferior.

Finally, we conclude with a discussion on the representation of gays in the media which situates gay issues and images within the context of various cinematic narrative modes being used.

**Florence Jacobowitz**  
**Richard Lippe**

**THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF RITA HAYWORTH** was taken in 1946 around the time of the release of *Gilda*; its function was to promote an individual star as well as a particular film. Our attraction to this extraordinary image of Hayworth in the 1980s is no longer contingent upon the original intentions of its producers. Although the photograph still reminds us of the star and the film, it also suggests a complex of information concerning a specific historical moment and its particular social and cultural inflections.

**THE PHOTOGRAPH SUMS UP** the definitive image of Hayworth which was crystallized through her enactment of *Gilda*; it strikingly typifies our expectations of this star who was known for her beauty and sex appeal. In fact, Hayworth personified the image of the Hollywood love goddess during the 1940s. The low position of the camera in relation to Hayworth invests her with a certain amount of power. Although one's attention is drawn to the body — the pointed breasts, the bared shoulders, the cascading hair, the parted lips — and to its inviting reclined position, Hayworth counters the objectification that is classically suggested through this iconography. In addition to the angle which empowers the image, Hayworth appears self-possessed and in control. The tilted head, the expression on her face, the lit cigarette in the foreground denies the spectator easy appropriation of her sexuality. The tossed-back head almost caressing the bare shoulder suggests a narcissistic posturing as if Hayworth is indifferent to the camera/spectator for whom she is posing. It is clear that the star is aware of her sexual attractiveness and has the confidence to aggressively flaunt her femininity. More specifically, Hayworth retains control without resorting to masculinizing her appearance as is often the case in the 1940s. On the other hand, unlike the typical pin-up of the period, Hayworth evokes a graceful elegance. Although the satiny texture of the black evening gown juxtaposed against the shimmering material of the couch connotes a tactile sensuality suggesting her nudity underneath, the assured look Hayworth projects inhibits the vulgarization of her identity. Hayworth seems relaxed and comfortable even though she is posed in an artificial posture. The





image conceals nothing — the lighting pattern exposes the sexuality that Hayworth exhibits. Aside from the black strapless sheath, she only wears a collar-like necklace which, along with the long fingernails, adds a suggestion of the feline to the image.

**IN PART, THIS IMAGE** is as typical of the 1940s noir femme fatale as it is of Hayworth's persona. Although the film noir woman was conceived negatively, as presenting a threat to patriarchal normality, the image acknowledges a representation of femininity which boldly embodies characteristically 'masculine' traits of sexual assertion, strength and power. But in contrast to the archetypal film noir woman, Hayworth does not project the cold, hard qualities used to distance the spectator from this feminine

aberration. Because Hayworth brings other non-noir aspects of her persona to the image, she succeeds in subverting the ideological implications underpinning the classical representation of the noir woman. The photography redefines the stereotype, making it more positive and less threatening.

**IN A SENSE HAYWORTH** denies the masculine appropriation of female power and sexual desire so prevalent in our culture, hence achieving an extraordinary reworking of expected gender characteristics. This is why the image is ultimately so compelling. It attests to the possibilities of breaking down rigid definitions of gender through stars and popular entertainment.

**F.J./R.L.**





Kim Novak: Columbia images, 1954-1960.



# Kim Novak:

## A RESISTANCE TO DEFINITION

by Richard Lippe

### WHY KIM NOVAK?

**B**EYOND THE FACT THAT I have a strong response to Kim Novak's filmic presence, I have chosen her to investigate the Hollywood star phenomenon for several reasons: 1) Novak's image, from the outset, foregrounds the manufacture process which is obscured to varying degrees in the construction of most star images; 2) She achieves almost immediate stardom; 3) Novak's screen presence often functions to undermine or contradict elements in her initial image construction that were intended to reinforce certain cultural stereotypes of female identity and sexuality; 4) Her stardom occurs at the end of Hollywood's classical period but continues during a transitional decade which found the Hollywood cinema trying to attune itself to the changing social and cultural *mores*. In this paper I will elaborate on these points using secondary texts such as biographical and critical writings, studio publicity/journalistic items, media reports on off-screen activities, etc., and Novak's films which are the primary texts. As the secondary and primary texts interpenetrate, it is impossible to maintain a strict division between the two in discussing Novak's image.

Much of the recent work done on female star images has been centred on stars who display strong, independent screen personas, i.e., Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, Joan Crawford. Beyond having distinctive presences, these stars are fascinating because they convey highly ambiguous

gender connotations making them of particular interest to critics concerned with gender construction and definition. Alternatively, there has been a consideration of the female star as victim of the Hollywood industry, i.e., Marilyn Monroe, Judy Garland. Although both of these areas of concentration have been invaluable in providing a better understanding of the ideological implications that can be embedded in a star image, there has been a tendency to ignore female star images that appear to be less conducive to political analysis. But, as the Jane Clarke and Diana Simmonds pamphlet "Move Over Misconceptions: Doris Day Reappraised" (BFI, 1980) and the Richard Dyer article "Four Films of Lana Turner" (*Movie*, No. 25, Winter 1977/78) illustrate, these two star images prove to be less transparent than they initially appear to be.

Novak's star image lacks the kind of ingredients thought to be essential to the undertaking of a serious critical analysis; but, as I argue, it is precisely the ambiguity of the image which is important. In this respect, Novak's screen persona, which hinges on disrupting female stereotyping, is relevant to feminist concerns. I hope to demonstrate in this article that Novak's star image is both complex and, in a certain respect, progressive.

### A STAR IS MADE

**C**OLUMBIA PICTURES, in their initial press releases on Novak, claimed talent agent Louis Schurr spotted her cycling in Beverly Hills. However, the claim, which makes indirect reference to the discovery of Lana Turner in a Los Angeles drug-

store, was soon withdrawn for what appears to be a more accurate account of how Novak came to the studio's attention.<sup>1</sup> In itself, the incident isn't critical but it does indicate that the manufacture process was already close to the surface. On the other hand, certain long-standing studio practices which, in retrospect, appear to encapsulate a manufacturing of the star, were still standard procedures during the early 1950s. For instance, it is unlikely that Novak's grooming treatment, i.e., the capping of her teeth, the lightening of her ash blonde hair, the improving of her figure through body building and dieting, was appreciably different from that given any new studio contractee. Similarly, the major studios, invariably, used the fan magazine and newspaper supplements to introduce their new contractees to the public. Sometimes, as with Novak, the publicity campaign, which included the publishing of glamour and candid photographs, profiles, interviews, gossip column items, began before the actor appeared in any of the studio's films.

Arguably, the more salient aspect in the foregrounding of Novak's manufacturing is found in the fact that Columbia Pictures made so little attempt to disguise the economic motivations underpinning their construction of her as a sex goddess. The studio needed on the one hand a replacement for Rita Hayworth and on the other a rival for Marilyn Monroe; the 'manufacture' of Novak's image was intended to fulfil both these functions. (This already introduces a major contradiction in the image which will be developed later in discussing the films.) In early publicity such notions as talent, acting ability, etc., are almost





*Pushover: Reluctant femme fatale.*

non-existent; instead, her 'qualities' are reduced to something so vague as to verge on the indefinable, the publicity constructing Novak herself as totally passive, unaware of these mysterious potentials. For example,

Kim herself doesn't really know what happened, because she is still in the labored process of catching up with her bewildered self. It has not been easy, nor does her future indicate that it will be any easier. Six pictures adding up to fifteen million dollars would be hard to absorb in any business. Rough and tough executives in steel or automobiles can only wish they could go before their rough and tough boards of directors with an asset like Kim. For a twenty-three-year-old, late of the five-and-dime, the accomplishment borders on dream-like fantasy.

But Marilyn Novak had that one tremendous, redeeming point that was to come to her salvation. It was what the camera saw, what Richard Quine saw, and a few others. It was a point she did not even suspect she had until, like everything else in her incredible life,

she was called upon to produce it. And though she produced it in Hollywood, it was back in Chicago's crowded West Side that it, like Kim herself, was born. It was the thing that was to take her to stardom and it's the thing that will probably keep her there in spite of anything she might do about it.

(*Photoplay*, November 1956,  
"The Girl with the Lavender Life,"  
George Scullin)

The attribution of total passivity greatly facilitated her production as pure commodity: she is credited with neither talent nor self-assertion and thereby can be rendered as object. Again, from *Photoplay* magazine:

In the meantime, the studio was beginning to realize that Dick Quine was developing a new and wondrously valuable piece of property in the girl who was still going under her christened name of Marilyn Novak. Possibly a million-dollar piece of property, in which case a proper name for the product was as essential as a good name for a new soap flake.

(*Ibid*)

This commodification is reflected in the press response to her image at the time. Representative is the article "A Star is Made," *Time* magazine, July 29, 1957:

By ancient Hollywood practice, a star is made not just born. Kim Novak herself was virtually invented, the first top-flight star ever made strictly to order, for delivery when needed. When Cohn's underlings found her, she was a small-time model, somewhat overweight and so utterly lacking in acting experience that, as one director put it "she had never even read the funnies out loud."

This image of Novak as invention is thoroughly endorsed by Harry Cohn himself: "If you wanna bring me your wife or your aunt, we'll do the same for them." (*Ibid*)

In view of this emphasis it is scarcely surprising that the widespread critical animus centred decisively on her alleged inability to 'act.' (It should be noted here that the entire concept of film acting is notoriously problematic. See Richard Dyer in *Stars* [1979] and Andrew Britton





*The Man With the Golden Arm: Reworking the girl-next-door.*

in *Katharine Hepburn* [1985]. Habitually, the concept is confounded by the notion of great acting as the player's ability to submerge him or herself in a variety of roles, e.g., Olivier; or as emotional authenticity, e.g., Anna Magnani.) *Jeanne Eagels* (1957), the film that intended to establish her as an actress, was the object of derision: "*Jeanne Eagels* cast her in the first part that is just beyond her grasp—that of an actress." (*Time*, July 29, 1957.) With *Pal Joey* (1957), this attack on Novak as an actress was, if anything, taken further by the critics. William Zinsser of the *New York Herald-Tribune* said of her performance:

(She) has reduced her acting technique to the process of rolling her large eyes back and forth like pinballs, in the manner of silent film stars, and since she says almost nothing she might as well be in a silent film.

(*Kim Novak on Camera*,  
Larry Kleno, 1980)

Significantly, Cohn's own attack on Novak seems to have been sparked off by her increasing self-assertion; this totally

passive and malleable 'creation' suddenly begins to demand a) more challenging roles and b) more money. As articles on the Cohn-Novak 'feud' noted, Novak's salary to star in *Jeanne Eagels* was \$13,000 while Jeff Chandler received \$200,000 for his supporting role in what was conceived from the outset as a Novak vehicle. These same articles pointed out that Novak's sole bargaining power was her current box-office value. Ultimately, despite strenuous efforts on her part, Novak never really escaped this image of herself as commodity. It haunts the critical and commercial response to her later attempts to prove her ability in strong acting roles—*Of Human Bondage* (1964) and *The Legend of Lylah Clare* (1968). For example, her Mildred in *Of Human Bondage* was regarded as overshadowed by the role's previous interpreters Bette Davis and Eleanor Parker; her audacity to take on such a role was dismissed as mere presumption. It is indicative of the attitude taken toward Novak as an actress that Robert Aldrich, in discussing *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, could ask "... is Kim Novak a joke in

her own time?" (*Sight and Sound*, Summer 1974, Vol. 43, No. 3).

## CONTRADICTION

**I**N OPPOSITION TO THE notion of Novak as a mere studio constructed commodity, the interest of her career and image resides in the ideological and cultural issues that they insistently raise: the objectification/commodification of images of women and the ways in which women set up resistance to that either consciously or intuitively; the relationship of star images to ideology and, particularly, to ideological contradiction. Even without taking into account the resistance manifested by Novak herself as a screen presence, contradiction is inherent in Cohn's original project.

On the one hand, Cohn wanted Novak to replace Hayworth who projected sexual knowingness and sophistication; but, on the other, if Novak was to rival the Monroe image of female sexuality she would have to enact the 'dumb blonde,'



projecting childishness and an innocence about her sex appeal. According to Paul Trent, *The Image Makers* (1982), Cohn decided on an image that would evoke Monroe's while having a distinctive edge of its own. Trent says, "In determining the proper image for Kim Novak, Harry Cohn saw her as being 'something a little more subtle, a little more old fashioned' than either Monroe or Mansfield. She was to be 'the promissory note of sex. She was to purr where others growled. She was to be half bitch, half baby. She was to have a sexy sweetness, a virtuous voluptuousness.'" Despite the fact that Novak's on-screen presence doesn't correspond to Cohn's initial definition of her image or sexual appeal, the studio made half-hearted attempts to retain the conception. For instance, George Sidney, under contract to Columbia Pictures, describes Novak in the following manner during the production of *The Eddy Duchin Story* (1956): "She has the facade and the equipment of a bitch in the long shot. Yet when you look in Kim's eyes in a close-up, she's like a baby. There is a fire with the sweetness, a bitchery with the virtue, all in one package." (*Kim Novak on Camera*). Several years later, Richard Quine, another Columbia Pictures contractee, defined Novak as possessing "the proverbial quality of both the lady in the parlour and the whore in the bedroom." (*Films in Review*, February, 1978, Vol. XXIX, No. 2).

Although Cohn's comments from *The Image Makers* suggest he was using Monroe as the basis of his conception of the Novak image, the notion that she was to be "half bitch, half baby" can be read as an attempt to amalgamate the Hayworth and Monroe images. The description also suggests an uncertainty on Cohn's part about the direction Novak's image should or would take. Again, considering the emphasis on Monroe as the image model, it is curious that Novak's first film for Columbia Pictures should be *Pushover* (1954) and not *Phffft!* (1954) which would seem a more likely choice. Actually, the casting of Novak in *Pushover* is intriguing in that the coupling of the character she plays with her youth could have been used to fulfill the "half bitch, half baby" image. But, in *Pushover*, a late entry in the film noir cycle, Novak's femme fatale displays neither of these traits; instead, the strongest impression she conveys is that of emotional vulnerability. Significantly, Novak, with her full figure, large bone structure and husky voice, isn't physically fragile. The vulnerability is tied neither to physical fragility nor to innocence: rather, it expresses a susceptibility

to emotional hurt, especially at the hands of men. The complexities of the persona are already fully apparent in *Pushover*, accounting perhaps for the curious and unexpected development of the Novak character in the film. The film noir tradition has always played upon notions of the ambiguity of the female character but the general practice (e.g., *Out of the Past*, *Human Desire*, *The Lady from Shanghai*) has been to reveal her as evil at the film's denouement so that the burden of guilt and blame can be placed squarely upon her. In *Pushover*, the exact reverse takes place: the Novak character, initially ambiguous and potentially dangerous, emerges as a sympathetic and attractive character capable of an unqualified emotional commitment to the hero. Her character is a far remove from the treacherous figures mentioned above. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine Novak playing an evil woman (although in the later stages of her screen career there has been an attempt to remold her in the bitch image).

Novak's presence functions to undermine the femme fatale stereotype in *Pushover* and this process—the film's inability to contain her within a conventional image of woman—testifies to the strength of her potential at the outset of her career. In contrast, it is interesting that her second feature, *Phffft!*, which attempts to construct the alternative Novak image of the dumb blonde, affords Novak no opportunity to effect a similarly drastic undermining of a stereotype. Novak is used purely as imitation Monroe and if, in hindsight, the imitation seems rather bad, it is due to the sense of strain and discomfort Novak expresses within the constraints of the stereotype. She lacks the two major attributes of the dumb blonde stereotype—Monroe's innocence and Mansfield's insentience. For example, in the scene in which Novak, wearing a strapless dress, asks Jack Lemmon to pin on the orchid he has given her, the intended anatomical joke is undercut by Novak's inability to become merely complicit. Again, her innate vulnerability surfaces and the joke's crudeness becomes transparent. It is Novak's obvious straining to make the joke work that foregrounds its vulgarity whereas perhaps Monroe's 'innocence' or Mansfield's 'insentience' about the suggestion would have made it work.

After *Phffft!*, Novak was cast in a Phil Karlson 'caper' film, *Five Against the House* (1955), which, while giving her public exposure, didn't significantly develop her image.<sup>2</sup> Her role, as the love interest of Guy Madison, is quite nondescript and conventional. It has, however, a tenuous relationship to the con-

traditions of her image in that she is both the 'girl next door' and a nightclub singer. It is her three next films that propel Novak into stardom. Within the industry, she was recognized as a major box-office attraction and the press treated her quick rise to fame as a media event.

*Picnic* (1955) is the first film to fully employ Novak's projection of vulnerability. The film is also significant in that her image becomes more expressly that of 'the girl next door.' Actually, in *Picnic*, Novak is playing a variation on the girl next door stereotype: she is the 'good' girl but, less conventionally, she is also the town beauty; additionally, whereas the girl next door stereotype displays such qualities as spunk, ingenuity and resiliency, Novak, in contrast, expresses a painful self-awareness of her limitations and the fact that her beauty is the sole source of her appeal. In *Picnic*, Novak, while sensing her objectification, isn't able to articulate her emotional needs or her growing resentment toward the continual reinforcement of her object status. The vulnerability Novak projects through hesitation and awkward attempts at self-expression make the character poignant; the trait also throws into stunning relief Novak's sudden assertion of her erotic/sexual identity which is given visualization through the "Moon-glow" dance she performs with William Holden. Novak's forceful expression of her sensuality is a direct challenge to the notion that the girl next door must be a desexualized person. Invariably, in the Hollywood cinema, the girl next door is a tomboy who learns she needs to be 'feminine' to attract the hero. As her purpose for existing is marriage/motherhood, she is without the erotic or sensual charge which would constitute a threat to the social concept of a 'suitable' wife/mother figure. While Novak, unlike such 1950s actresses as June Allyson, Debbie Reynolds and Doris Day who were typecast in the girl next door role, had a voluptuous figure, her combining of the 'good' girl and the sensual female involves more than just an erotic physical presence. Novak's vulnerability, which, to an extent, makes her appear passive, tends to defuse the premise that she is, as a woman, an aggressor; in particular, Novak's sensibility undercuts the notion that the hero, in order to gain a commitment from the girl next door, must accept total domestication. Arguably, it is more Novak's presence in *Picnic* than the screen writer's conception of the character which generates the tensions and contradictions surrounding her.

In *The Man With the Golden Arm*



(1955), Novak plays a B-girl who works in a sleazy Chicago nightclub; yet, as a female identity image, she is more akin to the girl next door than the good-hearted whore which seemingly would be the character's basis. As in *Picnic*, Novak's sensual presence and overt vulnerability are at odds with the conventional image of the 'good' girl. But, again, these qualities are utilized in fulfilling the image within the film. Frank Sinatra responds to Novak's physical desirability but, additionally, he perceives her sensitivity to the emotional pain he experiences. (In this respect, *The Man With the Golden Arm* strongly parallels the Holden/Novak bonding in *Picnic*.) Unfortunately, after establishing Novak's identity the film reverts to emphasizing Sinatra and his situation; Novak recedes into the background, becoming a maternal figure who is trying to save Sinatra from both his drug addiction and his neurotic wife who is exposed as the film's 'horror' figure. The schematic pairing off of Novak and Eleanor Parker as opposing female images vying for a commitment from Sinatra tends to conventionalize Novak's extremely distinctive reworking of the 'good' girl image and especially so in light of the over-determination involved to make Parker monstrous.

In between *Picnic* and *The Man With the Golden Arm* comes *The Eddy Duchin Story* (in fact the last of the three to be released).<sup>3</sup> *The Eddy Duchin Story* is Novak's first period film and, also, the first in which she plays an upper class character. Interestingly, Novak's persona or, more precisely, the lack of any clearly defined persona, enables her to cross class boundaries. In her later films, she will be equally at home playing the young working class woman of *Middle of the Night* (1959), the sophisticated proprietress of an exotic emporium in *Bell, Book and Candle* (1958) and the affluent bourgeois housewife of *Strangers When We Meet* (1960). In *The Eddy Duchin Story*, Novak has poise, wealth and a profession that satisfies her creative energies (she is an interior decorator); in contrast, Eddy Duchin/Tyrone Power comes from a lower class background, his parents having no higher aspiration for him than a career as a druggist, and he is presented as susceptible to humiliation. Yet, the vulnerability deriving from his uneasy social position is at least equalled by Novak's emotional vulnerability expressed particularly in her fear of the wind and premonitions of death, moments that strikingly anticipate *Vertigo* (1958). Novak's vulnerability is to some degree associated with her youth

(she was only 24 when *Vertigo* was made) and it is interesting that Columbia Pictures consistently cast her against older men, a strategy that culminates in *Middle of the Night*. *The Eddy Duchin Story* reinforces the fusion of the erotic and maternal woman with the Hollywood image of the girl next door.

These three films used Novak in a way that allowed her erotic presence to be contained within male-centred narratives. Additionally, most contemporary critics assumed that Novak's contribution to these films was decorative and her roles presented no real acting challenge. Respectively, Rosalind Russell, Eleanor Parker and Victoria Shaw were given recognition for 'performances,' whereas Novak was simply regarded as 'being.' In an audacious response to the claim that Novak wasn't an 'actress,' Columbia Pictures cast her as the lead in *Jeanne Eagels* in which she not only was called upon to give a strong histrionic performance but is actually cast as a famous actress. Furthermore, the film must also be regarded as the first 'Kim Novak vehicle'; there is no question here of her subordination in the film to a male star within a male-centred narrative. *Jeanne Eagels* is the type of star vehicle that is commonly read as standing or falling on the strength of its lead performance. (Arguably, the film's shortcomings can be more reasonably attributed to the inadequacy and insensitivity of its director, the invariably crude George Sidney. In addition to encouraging the entire cast to overact, Sidney indulgently employs expressionistic lighting and devices which impart an unwarranted grotesqueness to the film.) In *Jeanne Eagels*, Novak is no longer the girl next door, the erotic object or the maternal figure. (Interestingly, the film's ad campaign, whilst foregrounding notions of Novak as actress, simultaneously hedged its bets by emphasizing her physical endowments—the public would see more of her than had been revealed before.) Novak, in *Jeanne Eagels*, displays a strongly assertive presence who refuses to be defined by men or her relationship with them. In contrast to her previous characterizations, Novak plays an aggressive woman who to get what she wants transgresses the social dictates of moral behaviour. Not surprisingly, as in a 1950s Hollywood product, the film conveys a very ambiguous stance toward the character as a woman and a person. Her rebellion against masculine domination is linked to ruthless ambition; and Chandler, after receiving rejection, functions as a conscience figure labelling her, in equal measure, monstrous and

pathetic. It isn't until the film's climactic scenes in which she is shown to be a 'broken' woman that Chandler relinquishes his harsh position. In these scenes Novak's vulnerability, her most consistent filmic trait, comes into play as she admits her 'mistakes' in rejecting their relationship (in response, Chandler concedes that a stable marriage with her would have been impossible). This scene is almost immediately followed by one in which a defenceless Novak is verbally and physically assaulted by Murray Hamilton because she rejects his advances.

In a mirror-like fashion, Novak's on-screen assertiveness was reflected in her off-screen rebellion against Cohn. Novak's most potentially explosive act of 'defiance' occurred later the same year when she and Sammy Davis Jr. were reported to be having an affair. According to Bob Thomas, *King Cohn* (1967), Cohn, using threats, forced Davis into ending the relationship. Several months later, in 1958, Novak became involved with General Rafael Trujillo. There was an attempt to make the affair a 'scandal' as Trujillo had a wife and six children and, according to the press reports, was using American funding given to the Dominican Republic (which his father controlled) to court movie stars. Interestingly, neither of these incidents took on sensational aspects. The Novak-Davis relationship was stopped as soon as it became an 'item' and the Novak-Trujillo relationship was accounted for by the claims that Novak lacked the sophistication to recognize that Trujillo wasn't a Prince Charming. In contrast to Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe, Novak's off-screen activities never became a major component of her star image.

*Jeanne Eagels* was supposed to confirm Novak's status as an actress and a major box-office attraction.<sup>4</sup> From both viewpoints, the film produced the opposite results. Generally, the critical assessments of her performance were very negative and the film, an expensive production, didn't do well commercially. The popular press used the film to launch an attack on Novak and by implication Harry Cohn. As the *Time* magazine article mentioned earlier declared, Cohn was presumptuous in thinking he could pass off Novak as something other than a commodity. In addition to raising questions about Novak's box-office value, *Jeanne Eagels*, more damagingly, gave the critics sufficient grounds to discredit Novak's future performances without any qualms. With *Pal Joey*, which was released several months later, Novak was given a severe panning with-



out any consideration of her character's insipidity or comment on George Sidney's crass direction of Novak and the film's other two principals.

Conceivably, the public didn't respond to Novak playing a dynamic woman; but, as *Pal Joey* went into production before the release of *Jeanne Eagels*, her casting in the film doesn't bear any relation to the reception *Jeanne Eagels* was given. The casting appears to be more an indication that Columbia Pictures was uncertain about both Novak's screen persona and talent. In *Pal Joey*, Novak's image reverts to the girl next door who, by the film's 'happy ending,' has redeemed Frank Sinatra through both her perception of his moral worth and an unswerving commitment. Although Novak has a similar function in the three films preceding *Jeanne Eagels*, the conception of her character in *Pal Joey* in contrast is without any internal tensions or nuance. Whereas Novak's erotic presence was integrated into the 'good' girl image in the three previous films, it is reduced in *Pal Joey* to her doing a strip-tease; furthermore, her strip, which is stopped at mid-point, functions as a kind of titillation. (Within the diegesis, Sinatra's interruption of the number has dramatic significance; but, in any case, it is unlikely that the existing censorship codes would have allowed the

depiction of a strip beyond a certain point of undress.) The film is content to use Novak as an object and, in its treatment of Rita Hayworth, becomes overtly misogynistic. *Pal Joey* endorses Sinatra's manipulation and exploitation of women but in contrast suggests that Hayworth, who attempts to counter his power position through tactics not dissimilar altogether from those he uses to satisfy his ego-centred needs, is 'unattractive.' Essentially, the film celebrates Sinatra's 'masculine' behaviour and holds Hayworth responsible for any unsavory connotations the narrative produces. The demeaning attitude expressed toward Hayworth in the film is reinforced through the casting of Novak as her competitor. By 1957, it was common knowledge that Novak had replaced Hayworth as the studio's most important female property. To their credit, neither actress used the situation to generate off-screen publicity which seems to have been an implicit motivation in the casting decision.

With the arguable exception of Billy Wilder's *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964), *Vertigo* is the one great film in which Novak has appeared. The film is widely regarded now as Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece but what has not been recognized is the importance of Novak's contribution to the film's complex network of significa-

tion both as an actress and in terms of a highly sophisticated use of her star image, perhaps the fullest and most intelligent elaboration of her image's implications and contradictions. For example, Robin Wood in *Hitchcock's Films* (1966) finds Novak's performance as Judy inadequate, completely failing to grasp the connotations of her image or to recognize her manifest abilities as an actress when working with a director of distinction. (Even George Sidney never quite managed to negate them.) In fact, the film establishes a direct link to Novak's career by a precise reference. When confronted by James Stewart's insistence that they have met before, she produces identification to prove that three years earlier (roughly the time of *Picnic*) she left Salina, Kansas for the big city (exactly what Novak's Madge did at the end of the earlier film). The film's awareness of Novak's image is by no means restricted to a single reference. Its entire structure depends on a splitting of the identity of the lead female character and the two aspects of that identity correspond closely to the contradictory aspects of Novak's persona.

As Madeleine, Novak, in behaviour and grooming, gives the impression of having an upper class background recalling the socialite she played in *The Eddy Duchin Story*. In both films, Novak,



The construction of female identity: publicity still for *Vertigo*.



through her poise, elegance and 'classical' facial features, epitomizes femininity to the 'hero.' (In *Vertigo*, Hitchcock photographs Novak on several occasions in static, medium close profile shots to suggest that her features have a cameo-like perfection.) Additionally, in these characterizations Novak's surface composure is countered by an emotional vulnerability which is centred on her seemingly irrational premonitions of her death and a plea to the hero to stave off her 'destiny.' Crucially, whereas *The Eddy Duchin Story* pretends that every component in its idealized female image (Novak's Marjorie) exists independent of male wish-fulfilment, in *Vertigo* Madeleine's persona is revealed to be a 'construct' which is intended to flatter Stewart's fantasies. The film functions to foreground masculine and feminine role construction and express the artifice necessary to sustain Stewart's highly romantic concept of the 'ideal' female who magically embodies at the same time the accessible and the inaccessible, the carnal (Truffaut's word—see *Hitchcock*, 1967) and the ethereal.

As Judy, Novak plays a variant on the girl next door image. Judy, like Madge in *Picnic*, is very much the product of a lower middle class background, wants to be, ostensibly, a 'good' girl; yet, in make-up and dress she is blatant about displaying herself as a sensual presence. Clearly, in *Vertigo*, Novak's girl next door is no longer an 'innocent' discovering her erotic identity. Nevertheless, the image doesn't preclude a strong vulnerability and an awareness of her subordination to men; her reaction to Stewart's initial advances combines aggression, defensiveness, resentment and a simultaneous desire to respond. It is a mark both of the film's complexity and awareness of the Novak persona that here, as with Madeleine, we can never be sure to what extent Judy is giving a 'performance.' The Judy image may be just as much a construction as the Madeleine image: but, there is a difference: the Madeleine mask has been constructed by men, the Judy mask, which is signalled through gaudy and over-emphatic make-up, has been constructed both as a means of attracting men and a defense against them. What neither mask can suppress is the character's vulnerability which, in the case of both Madeleine and Judy, can't be regarded as merely 'acted.'

Arguably, *Vertigo*, without Novak, would still be Hitchcock's finest accomplishment; however, the strength of the existing film is, to a significant degree, dependent on Novak's presence. In particular, it is her plasticity both as a star



*Bell, Book and Candle*: Novak and Pyewacket.

image and actress that makes her so suitable in the role(s). Although Hitchcock had displayed a knowingness about star images in previous films (for example, the 'healthiness' associated with Ingrid Bergman's star image is in direct opposition to her roles in *Notorious* and *Under Capricorn*), Novak is used with particular sophistication. Hitchcock employs an aspect of Novak's star image—blondeness—to relate Madeleine to his 'cool' blonde creations which Grace Kelly most notably personified in *Rear Window* and *To Catch A Thief*; yet, because Novak is incapable of projecting either the emotional or physical self-assurance that the cool blonde image implies, her characterization holds an intriguing ambiguity. Furthermore, Hitchcock relies on the fact that Novak's star image precludes acting skills: the narrative hinges on Novak demonstrating that she is an actress. While her Madeleine/Judy role foregrounds the notion of giving a 'performance' it also produces a complex interplay between

performance and 'non-performance.' Paradoxically, Novak, as Judy, wearing excessively heavy make-up and a dark wig, appears to be signifying 'acting' through disguising herself but, within the diegesis, it is Novak as Judy playing Madeleine, who looks like Novak as she appears to the public as 'Kim Novak,' that constitutes her skill at performance. Jean-Luc Godard once said in discussing the possible 'readings' of a film that *Vertigo* could be read as a documentary on 'Kim Novak.' Specifically, he was referring to the fact that the film is a document of her physical presence but the perceptive statement applies equally as a comment on the film's use of her star image.

As a project, *Vertigo* must have appeared a highly commercial enterprise; most likely, its potential to be so contributed to Columbia Pictures' immediate reteaming of Novak and Stewart. With the same stars in the lead roles, *Bell, Book and Candle* makes reference to Hitchcock's film, but, as a



comedy, the Quine film is its polar opposite. Although a conjecture, the premise relates to the mechanics that Stephen Neale, in discussing the function of classical Hollywood genres (see *Genre*, 1980), calls 'regularized variety.' Neale's concern is to reformulate the concept of genre but the above-mentioned principle is just as applicable to the studio's star casting procedures. Commonly, to produce variation within a star image, an occasional contrasting project was used; in regard to Novak, *Bell, Book and Candle* was her first comedy since *Phffft!*

With *Bell, Book and Candle*, these casting concerns take on particular interest. Firstly, although Novak's witchcraft is the source of certain comic situations, the film doesn't employ her as a comedienne. Novak is cast as a witch who becomes human, i.e., loses her magic powers, when she falls in love with a mortal male. According to the film, to be human is to be vulnerable: after Stewart rejects her and she is abandoned by her familiar (Pyewacket, a cat), Novak cries, an indication that she is just an 'ordinary' person. (Conversely, the film implies that the desire to fall in love is a 'feminine' trait. The woman who makes a man fall in love with her is a threat because she makes the male vulnerable.) The dramatic resonance of the sequence crystallizes Novak's position within the narrative and validates the emotional weight and potential for pain she brings to her interpretation of a role in what is, after all, offered as a light comedy. In counterpoint, Stewart and the supporting cast give, essentially, comic performances. Secondly, *Bell, Book and Candle* reteams Novak and Stewart in a romantic comedy which, as an investigation into gender relations, raises certain issues not dissimilar to those found in *Vertigo*. Both films deal with the relationship between sexual desire and an objectification of the subject and the way in which the notion of romantic feelings is projected on to sexual desire to make it a 'legitimate' activity within the social sphere. But, intriguingly, *Bell, Book and Candle* differs from *Vertigo* in that the traditional gender-role positions (male/active, female/passive) are reversed. Novak chooses Stewart as the object of her sexual desire and then 'bewitches' him to ensure his submissiveness. In doing so, Novak is transgressing the concept of sexual difference which is the basis of patriarchal ideology. As punishment, she is stripped of her 'magic,' making her vulnerable or, in the film's terms, a 'mortal' woman. Novak, falling in love, wants to be solely the object of male sexual desire. Thereby, the film

constructs Novak and Stewart as a 'romantic' couple who enact the gender role positions assigned them within the dominant ideology.

As a romantic comedy, *Bell, Book and Candle* is inscribed by genre dictates which function to contain its heroine as an 'active' presence and, clearly, the film doesn't reflect a strong self-awareness of its underlying subject matter which might have provided, for instance, a more ironic perspective on its concluding sequence. Nevertheless, the film, despite its limitations, works very well as a companion piece to *Vertigo*. In both films, Novak has roles which, although employing crucial aspects of her screen persona, present her as having a more complex identity than her previous films suggested. Interestingly, neither *Vertigo* nor *Bell, Book and Candle* was a big commercial success; the fact suggests the possibility that the public was finding it increasingly difficult to find 'coherence' in Novak's image.

Whereas Novak's performances in *Jeanne Eagels* and *Pal Joey* were brutally attacked, the mainstream critics, in reviewing *Vertigo* and *Bell, Book and Candle*, were more pragmatic. Generally, it was felt that Hitchcock managed to extract a performance from Novak; but with *Bell, Book and Candle*, Novak, as an actress, was characterized as lacking animation. In *The Glamour Girls* (1975), the authors offer a quote from *Time* magazine as representative of the contemporary response to her performance: "The part is almost perfectly written for Actress Novak. The script quickly announces that as a witch she is not supposed to blush, cry, or indeed have very much expression at all." Repeatedly, after *Bell, Book and Candle*, reviews of Novak's performances focused on her 'lifelessness'; the implication was that Novak didn't fulfil the requirements of 'acting' which, of course, wasn't often given any definition. The *Time* magazine reviewer takes it as a given that Novak isn't and never will be an actress.

Like *Jeanne Eagels* and the later *Of Human Bondage*, *Middle of the Night* was intended to disprove the assertion that Novak's stardom was based solely on her beauty and sexual appeal.<sup>5</sup> Of these films, *Middle of the Night* was the most culture-conscious project, preserving its theatrical origins by having writer Paddy Chayefsky and director Delbert Mann repeat their respective roles in transferring the play on to film. Expressly conceived as an 'art house' film, it uses grainy black and white photography and extensive on-location shooting to pro-

duce a 'realistic' effect. And, although several of the film's actors, e.g., Frederic March, Glenda Farrell, Albert Dekker, had a long association with the Hollywood cinema, their professional reputations were built in 'performance' competence.

In *Middle of the Night* Novak is cast as an emotionally immature young woman who becomes romantically involved with her elderly employer; primarily because of their age difference, Novak and March, her lover, experience both internal conflicts and external pressures. Like Chayefsky's other 1950s projects, *Middle of the Night* is a piece of social commentary which is peopled with supposedly 'real-life'-like characters; yet, as in *Marty*, *The Catered Affair*, and *The Bachelor Party*, he relies heavily on stereotyping to create his characterizations. For instance, Novak's female image identity is, essentially, the child-woman. As with her girl next door role in *Picnic*, Novak disrupts the stereotype through her persona which reveals the co-existence of an extreme emotional vulnerability and a highly charged sensuality. Interestingly, Novak's roles in *Picnic* and *Middle of the Night* share certain similarities; in both films, Novak wants to be thought of as more than just beautiful or desirable and she achieves fulfilment as a woman through her commitment to a male who is anxious about his inadequacies which are, respectively, social (Holden) and physical (March). *Middle of the Night* offered Novak the opportunity to give a histrionic performance in a 'prestige' film but, unfortunately, her role is functional despite its apparent importance to the narrative's structure. Ultimately, the film, like *Picnic*, is a meditation on masculine anxiety which privileges March as its dramatic centre.

Although *Vertigo* and *Bell, Book and Candle* were commercial disappointments, Novak remained Columbia Pictures' most valuable box-office property. (To obtain Novak on loan-out, Hitchcock/Paramount agreed that Stewart would do two Columbia films.) As such, the decision to cast Novak in *Middle of the Night* seems to have held a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, the project provided her with a 'challenging' acting role but, on the other, her star presence in the film would be a significant contribution to an otherwise uncommercial property. Whatever Columbia Pictures' reasoning, *Middle of the Night* is another

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OPPOSITE: Publicity still for *Jeanne Eagels*.







example of the studio's uncertainty about Novak's image and its relation to her identity as a star and/or actress. Critically, Novak's performance received mixed reviews and, commercially, the film wasn't a success.

Richard Quine guided Novak through her screen test and first film; *Pushover* began an on-going professional relationship between the two which led to *Bell, Book and Candle*, *Strangers When We Meet* and *The Notorious Landlady*, Novak's final Columbia film.<sup>6</sup> In *Pushover*, Novak doesn't fulfil the expectations of the femme fatale who, traditionally, uses her sexuality and sensuality to victimize the male. (Compare Novak to Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*. As numerous critics have mentioned, the films are linked through the Fred MacMurray characterizations and certain narrative resemblances.) Similarly, in the melodrama, *Strangers When We Meet*, Novak is cast in a role which would, according to genre conventions, demand that she be discredited because of her adulterous transgressions. For instance, in the classical Hollywood melodrama, the female partner in an adulterous relationship is, generally, unattached, e.g. *Sunrise*, *Back Street* and *There's Always Tomorrow*. But, more importantly, patriarchal ideology divides these women into opposing categories: if the woman pursues her sexual gratification, she is, like the City Woman in *Sunrise*, defined through narrative positioning as evil. The genre's presentation of the sexually active woman as threatening and destructive finds its fullest expression in the film noir cycle. (In contrast, *Pushover* and *Strangers When We Meet* allow Novak to have sexual desires without condemning her.) Alternatively, there is the 'good' woman who isn't seeking sexual experiences per se but becomes involved in the relationship through love. Primarily, her wish, as in *Back Street* and *There's Always Tomorrow*, is to have a domestic existence with the male satisfying his need for a wife/mother figure.

While it is important to acknowledge that the Production Code permitted more explicit depictions of 'controversial' subject matter during the latter half of the 1950s, the film's presentation of Novak as an adulterous woman is exceptional. For example, Novak, in contrast to the adulterous Shelley Winters in *The Chapman Report*, displays an eroticism that foregrounds sexual desire in a very direct manner. (In addition, the resolution of each film is significant: in *The Chapman Report*, Winters, after admitting her 'error' and enduring her hus-

band's rebukes, is grateful to be reinstated as a wife/mother figure; the Quine film concludes with the implication that Novak will continue searching for sexual gratification in extra-marital relations.) Also Novak, like Ava Gardner generally and Jennifer Jones in her two films for King Vidor, doesn't relinquish her sexual subjectivity when she is, within the context of the narrative, the object of the male. Particularly, with Novak, it is her unaggressive eroticism that disrupts objectification; the result is the projection of her sexuality and not an image construction of female 'sexiness' which connotes the soliciting of male desire through the sexual objectification of the body. On the one hand, Novak conveys a seemingly intuitive resistance to being used as a sex object but, on the other, doesn't deny her sexuality or the desire to have intimate relations. (In this respect, of the later films, *Kiss Me, Stupid*, displays the most perceptive articulation of Novak's screen persona. Although the role may have been intended for Marilyn Monroe, Novak fully makes it her own.) Simultaneously, Novak gives the impression of being cautious about and desirous of sexual involvement and the combination produces a strong underlying tension within her persona.

*Strangers When We Meet* explores upper middle class suburbia and its underpinning bourgeois/capitalist value-system. Supposedly an idyllic environment privileging the nuclear family and offering a contemporary version of small-town communal life where everybody knows everybody, the film shows that the mythic American ideals suburbia celebrates produce an existence which breeds frustration, alienation and hypocrisy. (Walter Matthau's moralistic stance is revealed as a pretext covering his envy and lust.) Using the above-mentioned social ideals as an imperative to regulate individual sexual and creative energy, the environment is rife with tensions. Of the characters in *Strangers When We Meet*, Novak and Kirk Douglas are most sensitive to their entrapment and the film is, particularly, sympathetic to Novak's attempt to find sexual satisfaction. As a suburban housewife, Novak's energies are to be absorbed in fulfilling the domestic needs of her husband and child. Living under this unrealistic demand, Novak's sexual desires become her sole source of self-expression; and, as her sexual needs are a threat to her husband, Novak becomes increasingly desperate to have someone respond to her as a woman and a person. (Unlike Novak, Douglas, as a man, has had the opportunity to construct a professional iden-

tity that, although compromised because of his financial responsibilities as a husband/father figure, engages his creative energies.) Seeking physical and emotional release, Novak enters into an illicit relationship which gradually turns into a love affair. Ultimately, Douglas realizes that it is an impossible relationship; he cannot leave his wife whose existence is built around their marriage. After a poignant encounter between Novak and Douglas in which each declares love for the other, they separate, leaving Novak as isolated within her existence as before.

Fully employing Novak's vulnerable presence, *Strangers When We Meet* is also very sensitive to her star image. As in *Picnic*, Novak's beauty functions to set her apart from her mundane surroundings. (Arguably, aside from certain 'Madeleine' images in *Vertigo*, Novak is most lovingly photographed in *Bell, Book and Candle* and *Strangers When We Meet*. In particular, the former film is remarkable for the attention James Wong Howe and Quine devote to the lighting and framing of Novak in numerous shots throughout the film; additionally, Howe's highly stylized colour schema is beautifully conceived and executed.) While the character's identity as a female stereotype derives, as it does in several of her previous films, from the girl next door image, Novak's promiscuous sexual relations in the film evoke her status as a Hollywood love goddess. In fact, the Novak/Quine films make a substantial contribution to the love goddess aspect of her star image. *Bell, Book and Candle* most directly foregrounds her deity status by depicting Novak as possessing the power/attraction to put mortal men under her spell.

Once again, with *Strangers When We Meet*, Novak is cast opposite a male star who, in addition to being considerably older than she is, projects a strong 'masculine' presence. Although this is a familiar female/male casting practice during the 1950s, it is striking that, with Novak, there is no variation. Perhaps, Columbia Pictures didn't want to tamper with a proven strategy; in any case, it is intriguing to speculate on the possible teaming of Novak with a male star, i.e., Louis Jourdan, Montgomery Clift, whose screen persona embodies certain traits that are, culturally, considered 'feminine'.<sup>7</sup> In regard to performance styles, the film also contains another casting pattern found in numerous Novak films: Barbara Rush's performance style is to 'naturalize' a specific social type; and, to a great extent, Rush's characterization in *Strangers When We Meet* is her screen persona.<sup>8</sup> (In addition to this film,





*Strangers When We Meet*: Suburban romance.

Rush's other notable screen performance is in *Bigger Than Life* in which she plays another role-model suburban housewife.) If Rush's style calls attention to itself, as occurs in the Quine film, it is because the characterization displays a behavioural detail and nuance that foregrounds an 'acting' performance. In contrast, Novak's style doesn't 'naturalize' any of the various social types she enacts in her films. Partly, her hesitant gestures undermine the impression of 'naturalistic' behaviour but, more importantly, Novak, as a presence, embodies too many complexities and disrupts the notion that character 'coherence' is essential to the presentation of a particular social type. On the other hand, she doesn't give 'acting' performances in the Method or theatrical style. Essentially Novak's style is bound to her complex presence which, in turn, is part of the 'problematic' of her star image.

In comparison to the previous Quine/Novak films, *The Notorious Landlady* (1962) is marginal.<sup>9</sup> Although Novak has top billing, the film is primarily designed to display Jack Lemmon's comic talents. Again, as in *Bell, Book and Candle*, Novak, while initiating several comic incidents and participating in the film's final slapstick-like sequence, isn't used

as a comedienne. Novak is the 'notorious' woman of the film's title: alluding to the sexual connotations of Novak's star image, the film is an investigation into whether or not her seductive presence is 'dangerous' to the male species. *The Notorious Landlady* wants to imply that Novak may be a femme fatale placing her at the centre of the narrative's mystery but, as a comedy with romantic overtones, the film needs to deny the probability of such an identity. Possibly with *The Notorious Landlady* Quine was attempting to address, as does *Vertigo*, the ambiguities in Novak's screen persona; unfortunately, the film, to sustain itself as a comedy-mystery, has to present Novak as an inscrutable presence until its final sequence.

In 1961 Novak and Columbia Pictures tried to negotiate a new contract but neither accepted the other's terms. Instead, soon after completing her Columbia Pictures contract, Novak formed Kimco Pictures Corporation which, in conjunction with Filmways, co-produced *Boys' Night Out* (1962). The film, in the mold of the Doris Day/Rock Hudson sex comedies, hinges on the premise that Novak, a 'good' girl, is mistakenly thought to be a libertine and/or prostitute by most of the film's other

characters. Although *Boys' Night Out* employs a split in Novak's image, the film is never more than self-conscious about the good/bad division. Essentially, Novak's role is that of a catalyst, it doesn't provide an opportunity to produce a fully-rounded characterization.

Since this singular attempt to function as a producer, Novak has appeared in two films that are, unlike *Boys' Night Out*, of major interest. Firstly, *Kiss Me, Stupid* and *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, unlike the other feature films she has made as a freelance performer, are the efforts of distinctive directorial talents.<sup>10</sup> But, more specifically, these films, in highly different ways, inflect the complexities of her image. In *Kiss Me, Stupid*, Novak has a role which is in the tradition of Marilyn Monroe's variant on the dumb blonde and, in particular, bears a resemblance to her role of Sugar Kane in Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. The dumb blonde stereotype is a female image that, with the exception of another Monroe-like role in *Phffft!*, has no relation to Novak's previous screen identity; and, whereas a decade earlier Mark Robson had Novak attempt a Monroe imitation, with *Kiss Me, Stupid*, Novak's persona dominates her characterization. Novak gives a skillful comic/dramatic perfor-



mance as Polly the Pistol but she doesn't play the character as a 'wistful optimist' as, undoubtedly, Monroe would have done. As Novak/Wilder conceive Polly, there is none of Monroe's moral innocence about the character's identity. (On the film's release, the critics speculated on how Monroe's presence—and the casting of Jack Lemmon in the Ray Walston role—would have undercut the 'vulgarity' of the film's dialogue and premise.) Furthermore, Novak's Polly is too resistant to her sex-object status to make the viewer comfortable in taking the character as a dumb blonde. In fact, Novak's performance produces a kind of critical commentary on the notion of the dumb blonde stereotype as she makes it clear that the image is what the male characters in the film expect of her as a 'cocktail waitress.'

*Kiss Me, Stupid* gives Novak another role in which her female identity is 'split.' During the course of the film, Novak fulfils the images of both the whore and the wife and she does so without fracturing her character's identity to inhabit these opposing social image constructions. While *Kiss Me, Stupid* is successful in using Novak's image, *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, which had the potential to be the definitive Novak film, doesn't succeed despite its direct references to Novak's filmic identity. In addition to having Novak play a dual role as she does in *Vertigo*, *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, like Hitchcock's film, has a male protagonist who, because of his obsession with the image/identity of a dead woman, uses a substitute to reconstruct her and, in doing so, destroys both himself and the woman. And, as a 'Hollywood on Hollywood' film, *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, in foregrounding the 'production' of a Hollywood love goddess, makes an implicit association between 'Kim Novak' and Elsa/Lylah. More pointedly, for those viewers familiar with Novak's off-screen image, there is a Novak/Elsa link through the actress/character insisting on maintaining her given name when entering the industry. (Columbia Pictures wanted Marilyn Novak to change her name to 'Kit Marlowe.' Because of Monroe's prominence Novak agreed to drop the 'Marilyn.' In the film Elsa Brinkmann rejects Peter Finch's suggestion that she change her name; but, at an introductory press conference, he, to her surprise, identifies her as Elsa Campbell.) By the 1960s, Novak's gradual attempts to assert her own identity had become an aspect of the off-screen image; in the film, Novak's rebellion is mirrored in the increasing resistance Elsa/Lylah displays to the

control Peter Finch/Hollywood exerts over her. However, these references aren't satisfactorily incorporated into the overall conception of the film.

Robert Aldrich's *The Legend of Lylah Clare* has a double perspective. On the one hand, the film offers a vision of Hollywood that the public is familiar with and which, to a great extent, is dependent on Hollywood myth; on the other, the film attempts to provide an insider's perception to make a caustic statement on Hollywood's dehumanizing aspects. Primarily, Aldrich relies on the mythic version of the Sternberg/Dietrich relationship to give focus to the film. To this end, he evokes the classical Hollywood of studio moguls, powerful gossip columnists, etc. But the conception is then over-laid with a portrait of contemporary Hollywood of which Aldrich is just as critical. (Like many 'Hollywood on Hollywood' films, Aldrich's film carries Pirandello-like connotations. Ultimately, in *The Legend of Lylah Clare* 'fact' and 'fiction' become indistinguishable through filmic illusion.) As such, *The Legend of Lylah Clare* is extremely ambitious but, in trying to be all-encompassing, it becomes disjointed. Additionally, Aldrich in his customary manner reduces character and situation to their broadest levels. With *The Legend of Lylah Clare* the result is a grotesqueness which engulfs even those characters who are, presumably, the film's more sympathetic creations. For instance, it is difficult to know what Aldrich intends the viewer to make of Novak's Elsa/Lylah. The character functions, in a way, as the film's heroine as she offers the sole challenge to Peter Finch's monstrous ego and ultimately destroys him. Yet Aldrich, in having Hildegard Knef dub Novak, makes her Lylah so bizarre that a credible characterization ceases to exist. On a more fundamental level, Aldrich's refusal to explain how Elsa has become possessed by Lylah precludes the possibility of any coherent characterization and renders impossible the kind of complex play with Novak's image that Hitchcock realized in *Vertigo* with such insight and delicacy.

Aldrich, unlike Hitchcock or, for that matter Sternberg, never displays a strong identification with the female characters of his films. Interestingly, in other Aldrich films which have a forceful central female protagonist(s), e.g. *Autumn Leaves*, *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, *The Killing of Sister George*, these women are given, as in *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, freak-like connotations. (Arguably, *Hustle* is an exception; but, even in this film, Catherine Deneuve

plays a prostitute who enjoys the more kinky aspects of her profession, which makes her, according to the film's hero, a 'pervert.') Aldrich's professed liberalism may have contributed to his attraction to women who don't conform to the social expectation of feminine identity; yet, in his films, the attraction is often countered by a sense of revulsion. Perhaps the most extreme illustration of his contradictory impulses toward the 'unnatural' woman are given expression in his two films, *The Killing of Sister George*, and *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, which feature lesbian and/or bisexual characters. Although neither film 'condemns' these women, there is no sense that Aldrich is able to empathize with them.

The ambiguousness of Novak's image includes a lack of strong identification with any particular concept of female identity. Interestingly, in reply to press assertions that she was 'afraid' to marry, Novak once said that marriage was 'unnatural.'<sup>11</sup> By implication, there is in her image the rejection of a rigid sex-gender role and, as a result, the image carries an inherent potential to express a sexually ambiguous identity. But it isn't until *The Legend of Lylah Clare* that Novak has a role which involves an uncertainty about her sexual orientation; and, while the direct references Aldrich makes to Novak's image are intriguing, the film's introduction of a sexual ambiguity into her role is its more striking aspect.

Soon after breaking with Columbia Pictures, Novak bought a retreat-like house near Big Sur, California, claiming that she was content in the company of nature and her animals, and that Big Sur, unlike Hollywood, offered her an environment within which she could be 'herself.' She insisted that her interests in painting and composing were just as important to her as a film career. The move produced a partial alteration of Novak's image. Her rejection of Hollywood for a bohemian existence signalled defiance, and to a degree, this self-assertiveness is reflected in Novak's films. From *Of Human Bondage* onward, she played aggressive and/or strong-willed women. (Novak, in choosing to portray more 'active' women, may have been attempting to counter the criticism that, as a screen presence, she was wooden and lacked animation.) Ironically, it is when Novak begins to make a public display of her 'independence' that

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OPPOSITE—*The Legend of Lylah Clare* (above). *Kiss Me, Stupid*: the not-so-dumb blonde (below).









*Of Human Bondage: Self-assertion.*

the image takes on the connotations of a sex symbol. During the 1950s, Novak's publicity seems to be primarily directed to a female audience; in the 1960s, the sex image suggests an attempt to attract a male audience. While the 1960s permissiveness can be seen as a factor in directing her toward a sex image, there is the possibility that Novak or her advisors felt she needed such an image to remain a commercial property. (In addition to 'nude' scenes in *Of Human Bondage*, *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* (1965), *The Legend of Lylah Clare* and *The Great Bank Robbery* (1969), Novak did a 1965 *Playboy* lay-out.) In any case, the overt sex image, which may have influenced her decision to do *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* and the even cruder *The Great Bank Robbery*, tended to flatten out the sexual and emo-

tional tensions that exist within her screen persona.

Soon after completing *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, Novak did *The Great Bank Robbery* which is primarily a Zero Mostel vehicle. Nevertheless, it marks Novak's last substantial role in a feature film. Novak's participation in *Tales That Witness Madness* (1973), *The White Buffalo* (1977), *The Mirror Crack'd* (1980) and *Just a Gigolo* (1981) is minimal and, in the latter two films, she has roles which rely more on caricature than characterization. In both of these films, there is a toying with the notion that Novak is parodying her one-time image as a Hollywood love/sex goddess and, in a sense, it is what the contemporary audience expects of her as she has no reputation as an 'actress.' *The Mirror Crack'd*, with its 'Hollywood on Hollywood' film conno-

tations, is aptly titled as the film employs its 1950s Hollywood performers and Novak, in particular, to create a kind of distorting mirror effect: 'Lola Brewster' is 'Kim Novak' producing a reflection of 'Lylah Clare.' As Novak's image has no longer any specificity, she has come to represent, as she does in *The Mirror Crack'd*, a mere generalized evocation of a 1950s Movie Star.

Since *The Legend of Lylah Clare*, Novak's most important project has been the telefilm, *The Third Girl From the Left* (1973) in which she plays an aging chorus girl who is attempting to deny her fears that she is seen more as an object than a person. During the course of the telefilm, Novak/Gloria undergoes experiences in both her professional and personal life that confirm these fears but, ultimately, she hasn't the self-confidence to act on



what she knows. In the context of the general hardening and coarsening of her persona in the late films, *The Third Girl From the Left* stands out as an instance in which Novak's emotional vulnerability is given expression.<sup>12</sup> The telefilm, which was written by Dory Previn, establishes its tone in a striking credit sequence which features Previn's plaintive song "Gloria" on the soundtrack while the visual track begins with a freeze frame shot of Novak in close-up looking intently at her unadorned face in what is to be taken as an off-screen mirror. During the course of this almost three-minute montage which combines freeze frames and actions shots, Novak gradually applies stage make-up constructing her 'face.' At the conclusion of the sequence, she forces a vacuous smile for the mirror/camera but, then, quickly withdraws it, realizing that the image in the mirror isn't an accurate reflection of who she is. Although *The Third Girl From the Left* cannot be regarded as making an explicit feminist statement, it is perhaps the Novak project which comes closest to doing so.

*The Third Girl From the Left*, like a number of other late Novak films, is highly self-reflexive: in subject matter and characterization, the telefilm refers back to *Pal Joey*—pointedly, the Tony Curtis character is named Joey and Gloria, like Novak's Linda in *Pal Joey*, has the reputation of being a 'good' girl; a portrait of Novak/Gloria displayed in two scenes is a Richard Avedon publicity photograph taken in conjunction with the making of *The Legend of Lylah Clare*; Gloria, like Novak, wants to be taken seriously as an artist. On the other hand, Novak's participation in and contribution to *The Third Girl From the Left* isn't dependent upon these referents. Playing a sensitive woman who, while aware of her entrapment, lacks the dynamic intelligence that might enable her to escape from it, Novak, uniquely among the late films, is able to construct a poignant and rounded characterization that draws on the accumulated complexities of her persona—the resistance to objectification and image-definition, the hesitancy, the vulnerability.

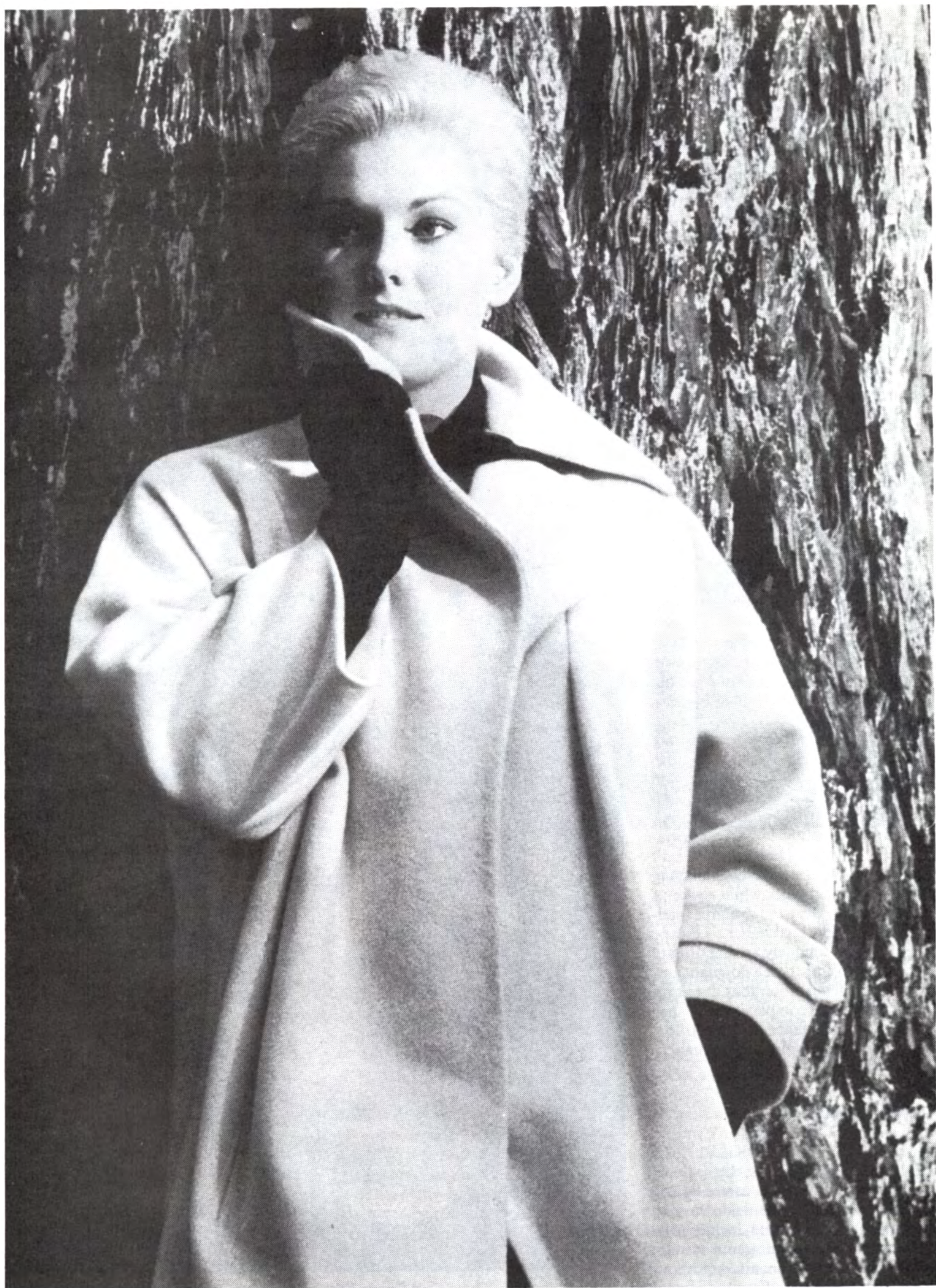
## CONCLUSION

**T**HERE IS NO SINGLE FACTOR which explains the gradual decline of Novak's career during the 1960s. The determinants, in varying degrees of weight, would include: the demise of the studio-star-genre system, cultural changes, an uncertainty about her on-screen and/or off-screen image,



"Gloria" in *The Third Girl From the Left*.







ill-chosen vehicles and perhaps an eventual lack of commitment on Novak's part to keep active as an actress/star. (In 1976 she married Robert Mallory, a veterinarian, and subsequently announced that, as an actress, she was in 'semi-retirement.') In the 1960s, Novak was, of course, just one of a number of Hollywood actresses whose careers were in jeopardy. In contrast to Novak, Doris Day, Debbie Reynolds and Audrey Hepburn were actresses who had very clearly defined images. For these actresses, it was their inability to sufficiently modify the images to the 1960s concepts of the contemporary woman that produced career impasses.

With a few exceptions, Hollywood actresses don't have long careers. Those who do, e.g., Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, have sharply etched on and off screen images which could be regulated to incorporate the personal and social changes these actresses encountered through the decades. Additionally, with Hepburn and Dietrich, their initial screen appearance provided a challenge to the contemporary Hollywood images of established female identities. In comparison, the most distinctive aspect of Novak's image is ambiguity and it is the source of both its strength and limitations. If Novak's image had developed more definition, it might have lost much of its fascination and complexity. □

## FOOTNOTES

1. Below I offer a brief biographical outline which includes background information on Novak preceding her involvement with Columbia Pictures:

### 1933

Born. Names Marilyn Pauline. The Novaks live in Chicago—westside; lower to middle class income bracket. Both parents are of Czechoslovakian descent. No show business members in family background.

### 1946-1950

Novak joins Fair Teen Club—a young girls' social group sponsored by a Chicago department store; becomes a teen fashion model; wins scholarship to Patricia Stevens Modelling School; wins beauty contest and is crowned 'Queen of Lake Michigan.'

### 1952

Wright Junior College—Chicago; takes drama course—does a walk-on saying "hello" in a production of *Our Town*.

### 1953

Takes summer tour job demonstrating electrical appliances as 'Miss Deep Freeze'; tour concludes in San Francisco; Novak goes to Los Angeles and registers with Caroline Leonetti Modelling Agency; through the agency, she is hired as an extra on *The French Line* (RKO, 1954), *Son of Sinbad* (RKO, 1955). Although unconfirmed, it has been reported that she worked as an extra in *Veils of Bagdad* (Universal, 1953). In addition, she does 'calendar-girl' posing.

Novak is introduced to talent agent Louis Schurr who, in turn, arranges for her to meet Max Arnow, the casting director for Columbia Pictures; after a screen test, Novak is given a six month starlet contract at \$100.00 per week; on the studio's suggestion, Novak moves into the YWCA 'Studio Club'; after three months dramatic coaching, she is cast in *Pushover*.

The account I gave, which comes from various reading sources, is the most comprehensive I have been able to uncover. This isn't to suggest it is necessarily without omissions in regard to the actual facts concerning Novak's connections in Hollywood at the time.

2. Novak signs a long-term contract with Columbia Pictures and now receives a salary of \$250.00 per week. Novak is promoted as 'The Lavender Blonde' to give her a more distinctive image—she is repeatedly dressed in the colour and has a lavender hair tint. Supposedly, the studio claims a 'serious' relationship isn't good press at this point in her career but Novak continues to date Mac Krim, a theatre-owner and real-estate investor. The fan magazines speculate on whether or not they will marry and what effect this will have on her career.
3. In 1956, Columbia Pictures sends Novak to the Cannes Film Festival. She meets Aly Khan and his family, and, according to the press reports, becomes romantically involved with a Count Mario Bandini—the fan magazines suggest these 'romances' might end her relationship with Krim. These magazines also wonder about the consequences of Novak's exposure to Continental glamour—as a 'good' hard-working middle-class girl, she may be swayed by this heady environment forgetting about her career obligations.
4. The 1957 salary dispute between Novak and Cohn was settled with a new contract giving Novak \$2,750.00 per week.
5. Cohn died in early 1958. From the outset, Cohn had taken a personal interest in the management of Novak's career and, with his death, Novak began having greater freedom in choosing her film projects.
6. For several years, beginning in the late 1950s, the Novak/Quine relationship was

also a personal involvement. During the making of *Strangers When We Meet*, the press rumoured that Novak and Quine would marry. Novak was labelled a 'bachelor girl' and the fan magazines wondered why she resisted marriage.

7. Although Tyrone Power's delicate facial features and overt sensitiveness don't conform to the image of the 'masculine' male, Power modelled his screen identity on the action-oriented 'hero' figure. Also, Power's screen persona lacked the inner emotional resources to produce a complex sensibility.
8. *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *Vertigo*, *Bell, Book and Candle* and *Strangers When We Meet* feature actresses—Eleanor Parker, Barbara Bel Geddes, Janice Rule and Barbara Rush respectively—who have reputations as acting talents.
9. Between *Strangers When We Meet* and *The Notorious Landlady*, Novak appeared in George Sidney's *Pepe* (1960). She was among the 35 stars featured in the film. Novak had a cameo role playing 'Kim Novak.'
10. None of the 10 features Novak has appeared in since becoming a freelance performer has been either a critical or commercial success.
11. Shortly before the release of *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders*, Novak and Richard Johnson, the film's male lead, were married. They were divorced the following year because, Novak claimed, their lifestyles were incompatible.
12. Currently, Novak is featured as a 'guest star' on the 1986-87 season of ABC's *Falcon Crest*. When her appearance on the series was announced, Novak's role was described as being modelled on her *Vertigo* characterization. The relationship is obvious enough but to date the television role represents a crude simplification of her complex dual image in Hitchcock's film. Essentially, what is occurring is a capitalization on her star presence and the recent re-release of *Vertigo*. The attempt at self-reflexiveness is underlined by naming Novak's character 'Kit Marlowe.'

OPPOSITE—*Vertigo*: Image of vulnerability.







# Joan Bennett:

## IMAGES OF FEMININITY IN CONFLICT

by Florence Jacobowitz

**T**HIS YEAR, THE VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL Film Festival staged a tribute to Joan Bennett. This surprised me because when I mention that I am researching the star image of Joan Bennett, responses often range from "Joan who?", "What films did she star in?" to "Was she really a star?" In part, I can understand this; although Bennett undeniably was a major star in the '40s, there are few easily identifiable characteristics associated with her persona as there are with many of the great female Hollywood stars. Although acknowledged as "beautiful," Bennett's beauty was not particularly distinctive. Her beauty conformed to cultural notions of attractiveness then prevalent (petite, slim, small facial features) and was noteworthy to the extent that she modelled clothes well (a fact frequently reported and played upon). She was not exceptionally glamorous (like Hayworth), exotic (like Lamarr or Dietrich), mysterious or aloof (like Garbo), healthy and sexual (like Bergman), an actress (like Davis), the tomboy/upper class eccentric (Hepburn), or the strong, independent survivor (Stanwyck/Crawford). Neither is her image strongly iconic; Bennett's dramatic hair colour change from blonde to brunette in *Trade Winds* (1938), which she kept afterwards, only served to make her look "more like Lamarr than Lamarr."

The attribute most repeatedly publicized and closely associated with Bennett's offscreen star image was her domesticity. Bennett was known as the beautiful young mother (the first of her four daughters was born when she was 18) and later grandmother, and as a charming wife/hostess. In many ways Bennett typifies the "bourgeoisification" of stars that theorists like Edgar Morin and Richard Dyer suggest took place in the late '30s and '40s (*Stars*, BFI, 1979, p. 24). Stars became less distanced from the movie-goer and appeared to be more credible and ordinary. As filmic narratives explored psychological realism, audience identification with the central protagonists gained importance. Stars are still different, exceptional and special, yet they are approachable men and women with whom one can identify. Bennett's offscreen public image, particularly in the '40s, played upon her success at combining home life with a career. She was marketed as being capable, level-headed, organized and extraordinarily ordinary. This

image intensified after her marriage to Walter Wanger, a successful and powerful movie producer. Wanger served as president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences from 1939-1945, as well as heading a number of committees which acted as liaisons between the industry and the government. Wanger had a number of prominent stars under contract to him (including Charles Boyer, Henry Fonda, Sylvia Sydney and Joan Bennett) and was powerful enough to produce big-budget projects which were distributed through the major studios. The Wangers provided a steady stream of publicity/gossip as one of Hollywood's most prominent couples. After their wedding, Wanger took up residence with Bennett in her large Holby Hills home, and their frequent parties, holiday occasions, family outings, etc. were all well-documented.

In addition to being publicized as a wife, mother and hostess, Bennett was noted to be a financially successful business woman. In 1943 she published *How to Be Attractive* and in 1944 she helped found Diana Productions along with Walter Wanger and Fritz Lang. Through Diana, Bennett helped set up choice projects (like *Scarlett Street* [1945], in which she co-stars). She was one of the few stars not attached or beholden to a particular studio; Bennett had more control in choosing which projects she took on and was responsible for managing her image and keeping herself a desirable commodity in a highly competitive marketplace.

It is beyond the scope of this paper or the intention of my discussion to attempt an in-depth reading of Bennett's significant films during this period; however, even the most cursory look at the roles she takes on and the traits associated with the women she plays, marks a glaring contradiction between the offscreen and onscreen personas. Onscreen Bennett plays out the dark side of her offscreen 'day' persona—she is the quintessential emasculating femme fatale, sometimes a prostitute (*Manhunt* [1941], *Scarlet Street* [1945], *The Woman in the Window* [1944]) or a woman who is married (or 'spoken for') yet has an affair or is attracted to another man (*Margin for Error* [1943], *The Woman in the Window* [1944], *The Macomber Affair* [1947], *Woman on the Beach* [1947], *The Reckless Moment* [1949]) and is sometimes suspected of killing her husband (*Margin for Error* [1943], *The Macomber Affair* [1947]). Her roles in the '40s are notably different from the blonde ingenue types she plays in the late '20s and '30s. During those years Bennett's offscreen public image more or less coincides with her onscreen roles. She is described as being sweet, fragile (writers note her china complexion), little girlish (often described as the girl-mother/wife), gentle and vulnerable. In an article entitled "Joan Dares to Break the Bennett

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OPPOSITE—A publicity portrait of Joan Bennett in her 'blonde' period in the '30s.





Joan Bennett and Edward G. Robinson in *The Woman in the Window*, 1944.

Tradition," Gertrude Hill compares her to a "Dresden china figure . . . tender eyes . . . petulant mouth. Joan is the ideal heroine of the nineteenth century novel . . . a Greuze come to life."<sup>1</sup> She is often described as the "eternal ingenue." Bennett often plays upper-class heroines and speaks in an unnaturally high voice (for example in *Disraeli* [1929], *Little Women* [1933], *Mississippi* [1935]). Her 'class' pretensions are played upon in her biographical publicity. The youngest daughter of actors Adrienne Morrison and Richard Bennett, Joan was born in Palisades New Jersey, was raised by nurses and governesses and was educated at private schools in the United States as well as a finishing school in Paris. Unlike her sister Constance, whose Hollywood debut preceded hers and who was known to be 'willful,' sophisticated and spoiled, Joan was the sweet innocent. In the mid-'30s her voice deepened, becoming more confident and experienced; however, it is not until her transformation to a brunette in *Trade Winds* that her image began to change radically. Bennett describes this period as "a time when I was vamping my way into a new phase in my career."

For ten years, with the exception of *Little Women* and *Private Worlds*, I'd played the insipid blonde ingenue, short on brains, long on bank accounts, the victim in a love triangle, and, for some reason that now escapes me, I was often English. Suddenly I found myself filming *Trade Winds* in a dark wig, and with eyes at half-mast and voice lowered an octave, I positively smouldered all over the South Seas.

(*The Bennett Playbill*, Holt, Rinehart, Winston, NY, 1970, p. 262).

The dark hair accompanied an entire change of image and personality. Offscreen this was translated into more sophisticated, tailored clothing and Bennett's presentation as a capable, responsible woman-of-the-world. Onscreen the image

becomes more sexual, alluring and transgressive. She is often perceived as guilty, mistakenly or not, of breaking the 'law' (be it social/criminal laws or sexual/generic ones) and is presented as the sexually confident 'clever' woman who is desirable yet dangerous.

The publicity poster in the press kit for *The Macomber Affair* uncannily gives the following advice: 1. *Never* get involved with a woman whose husband is a good shot. 2. It's safer to stay away from beautiful dames. 3. If you know a woman laden with trouble, let her take it up with her husband. 4. Don't get too friendly with the woman's husband.

The publicity for *Scarlet Street* describes her as a "bad, uninhibited lady . . . The things she does to men can only end in murder." One writer notes "the progress for an actress who was known as the perennial ingenue."

Other obvious changes include a lowering of the register of Bennett's voice and class position. The 'bad' sexual woman is usually working class/petit bourgeois. She is cool, calculating, and often unemotional (her lack of 'emotion,' expected of female actors, is sometimes raised in critical reviews as a fault). Her clothes range from masculine tailored suits to highly suggestive sexual dresses (which are not 'sexy' in the sense of being cut-out, skimpy or exposing). The first dress Bennett wears in *The Woman in the Window* is exemplary; her breasts (and nipples) are covered by a thin layer of flesh-tone chiffon-like fabric which only serves to draw attention to its inadequacy. She often smokes and drinks and is notably emasculating (particularly in both *Scarlet Street* and *The Macomber Affair*).

The only characteristic which overlapped the off-and-onscreen star image of Joan Bennett in the '40s was her ability to 'manage' and to remain in control of a situation. Offscreen these potentially transgressive aberrant attributes were dis-





Joan Bennett and Dan Duryea in *Scarlet Street*, 1945.

placed onto the capable wife and mother who could work and be a 'star' while remaining respectably within the limits of generic demands.

The rather blatant contradictions which inform Bennett's overall persona and star image in the '40s attract me. It is as if the offscreen emphasis on the woman's containment within the home will defuse the dangerous pleasures generated through the sexually powerful and threatening onscreen persona. As the decade progresses, the attempt to reconcile the conflicting messages her persona as a whole invites becomes more and more desperate. The only other star who evokes some of these same contradictions is Ingrid Bergman, yet her offscreen domesticity more easily meshed with her onscreen niceness, goodness and robust/rosy health, however tinged with an illicit sexuality. Both actresses are also comparable in the sense that their Hollywood careers were seriously endangered when an offscreen scandal tarnished, or realized, in Bennett's case, the transgressive sexuality previously relegated to the cinematic protagonists.

On December 13, 1951 Walter Wanger waited for his wife and her manager, Jennings Lang, to return to a parking lot; Wanger then fired two shots at Lang, one of which hit him in the groin. As Lang was rushed to a doctor, Wanger waited for police to arrive. He calmly explained to the arresting officers, "I've just shot the son-of-a-bitch who tried to break up my home." Although not on the same scale as the Bergman/Rosellini affair, Bennett's relationship with her agent unleashed a torrent of misogynist abuse from the press. It is unclear, from the press reports, who precisely was on trial. As *The Mirror* put it (1/1/52), "In this spectacular scandal, Wanger is the only defendant in the eyes of the law. But also a defendant in the eyes of the world is his beautiful movie star wife, Joan Bennett." Although marital breakdowns and immoral love affairs

are part and parcel of the expectations of Hollywood stars, Bennett seemed to be attacked with particular venom—not only because she had been continuously presented as a respectable wife and mother but also because she seemed too collected and in control of her emotions. In addition, the press commented on the fact that Bennett had been supporting Wanger financially (*Joan of Arc*, a Wanger production and box-office failure, had recently bankrupted him), irreparably damaging his ego. In fact, Bennett had usurped the husband's position of the strong provider.

In many of Bennett's interviews, and in the autobiography she co-wrote in 1970, Bennett mentions that being financially independent and secure was important to her. She enjoyed her activity in the public domain and worked consolidating professional and corporate power. She was also aware that in order to do so, she must still appear to be dependent and powerless. A fan article entitled "My Daughters Won't Make My Mistakes" could serve as a case study on the contradictions that are intrinsic to the construction of femininity. Bennett confesses her 'mistakes' in the hope that her daughters will benefit from what she has learned. "Girls should be self-reliant . . . Yet if she is, she loses the sweetest thing in life, complete reliance on the man she loves . . ." "They will never make the mistake of letting men know they are independent . . ." "I'd like Ditty and Melinda to be capable women, able to take care of themselves financially and in every other respect. But I'd like them to appear to be helpless with men. If a man is made to feel necessary—he'll be there. Men don't like independent women . . . of this I'm positive . . . they should hide their efficiency . . ."

Despite Bennett's "Mistakes" she managed to maintain a long career (in Hollywood terms, 20 odd years is lengthy) and remained a popular and bankable star into the '50s. (Although



the Jennings Lang shooting jeopardized Bennett's career, one could argue that there were few good roles available for 'mature' women in their 40s, particularly for a star who had often played the sexual femme fatale). Bennett's sustained popularity can be attributed to a combination of factors: carefully fed publicity which kept her in the public eye without oversaturating public interest; marriages to important men in the industry; opportunities Bennett, in part, created which allowed her to work with the cream of European directors then exiled in America (like Lang, Ophuls, and Renoir) and Bennett's business acumen and ability to adapt to market demand. Her much discussed hair colour change after *Trade Winds* is a case in point. She stayed a brunette, in part because the public liked it and also because Wanger tried to type her as a 'Lamarr' beauty, however, more significantly, the change allowed Bennett to mature and take on more diverse roles beyond the china-doll ingenue which she was outgrowing. Bennett was aware of this need to diversify and mentions it in interviews at the time. She saw her 'star' self as a commodity that must be carefully marketed in order to ensure survival in a competitive industry where younger actresses were being 'discovered' regularly and where market needs were created as well as catered to. She also knew that the audience expected a delicate balance of variation and familiarity. Bennett's recognition of her image as her security and collateral is evidenced in her investments and in her continued attempts to secure financial power. The Mapleton Drive home was described as "the house that Joan built." She married or was romantically linked to men each of whom was active in the film industry (John Considine, Gene Markey and Walter Wanger). Bennett herself attributes her separation from Wanger to both his sexual philanderings and his impending bankruptcy. She was willing to generate publicity to keep herself within the public eye and was adaptable to change—Bennett jumped into TV production in the very early years of television. In addition, she promoted a variety of products ranging from floor wax to fiberglass curtains. Bennett's ability to 'manage,' her business acumen, her capability, was noted throughout her career, inspiring both admiration and skepticism. Bennett's offscreen star persona ostensibly was safely confined to the domestic sphere; however she never came across as being helpless, dependent or particularly subservient.

Although the Lang/Wanger affair took place late in 1951, the general misogyny and malice directed at Bennett in the aftermath of the shooting was already evident in publicity material and in a number of reviews of significant films released in the '40s (notably *The Woman in The Window*, *Scarlet Street*, *The Macomber Affair*, *Woman on the Beach*). One senses that some of the critics resented her uncharacteristic masculine composure and aggression, yet weren't quite sure how to articulate this. Some complained of her lack of emotion. One reviewer smugly remarked upon Diana Productions' debut film, *Scarlet Street*: "Bennett's success as independent motion picture producer has achieved surprising initial success: The New York Board of Censors rejected *Scarlet Street* in its entirety."

The kinds of disturbances Bennett's persona generates centrally inform Max Ophuls' *The Reckless Moment*—a film which encapsulates the contradictions inherent in the Bennett image in its totality, as well as pointing to larger social tensions resulting from oppressive cultural conceptions of femininity. I believe that Bennett, like Lucia Harper, had little consciousness of the patriarchal network in which she moved, nor did she wish to upset this system (unlike perhaps Hepburn or Dietrich). Bennett worked hard to control her professional career, and to attain a degree of financial security and inde-

pendence, while maintaining the offscreen role of Mrs. Walter Wanger whose prime concerns supposedly were maintaining her French provincial home and raising her daughters.

The double-message, schizophrenic connotations of Bennett's star persona (her 'mistake' of letting men know of her desires to be independent and self-reliant) are symptomatic of a male dominant culture. They were especially pronounced in the social climate of post-war America, but these contradictions still speak to women today. Then, like today, women were half-heartedly encouraged to participate in the social world outside of the domestic realm (as necessitated in a depressed economy) yet were relegated to the nurturing/clerical services within the workforce. As Andrea Walsh notes (*Women's Film and Female Experience 1940-1950*, Praeger, 1984, p. 76), "National administration for patriotic wartime Rosies quickly turned to scorn for postwar working women who were depicted as 'neglecting families' and/or emasculating husbands."

These issues were regularly treated in a number of genres which were popular in the '40s and '50s, most notably in the film noir and in the melodrama. They outline masculine anxieties of ceding positions of dominance and control, as well as female vulnerability and insecurity within a male privileged social system. This is what Bennett's star image ultimately speaks: the limited roles afforded women and the impossible task of balancing personal needs with social, generic demands. It is not a little ironic that Bennett ended her career as a matriarchal vampire in the *Dark Shadows* TV series (and motion picture)—an image that ties together and illustrates the no-win situation women occupy within patriarchal society and within the nuclear family.

In the remainder of this article, I will elaborate upon some of the ideas suggested above by outlining examples relating to the manner in which the public image of Joan Bennett was constructed and circulated in fan magazines, in the press and in various forms of organized publicity and gossip.

I have set up the following categories which seem to account for most of Bennett's publicity before the shooting: the frequent emphasis on being a 'Bennett'; her role as a star/consumer as well as a business/career woman. Bennett's star image serves as a particularly useful case study on the manner in which female stars address dominant gender contradictions because the conflicting images of femininity which her image as a whole attempts to reconcile are brought to the fore in the press coverage following the Wanger/Lang shooting. Since Bennett never presented herself as a broken, remorseful or guilty woman, the press seemed particularly incensed and attacked her vigorously. As space is limited, I will mention a few of the most salient examples to illustrate the differences and correspondences between the pre- and post-scandal publicity.

## ON BEING A BENNETT

**J**OAN BENNETT WAS BORN INTO A FAMILY OF American dramatic stars headed by her father Richard Bennett and her mother Adrienne Morrison. Her debut in Hollywood was preceded by those of both her father and her sister Constance. Joan's status as a Bennett was particularly significant at the beginning of her career when Constance, and to a lesser extent Richard, were still known quantities. It diminished throughout the '40s when her family remained as liabilities at best (particularly Barbara Bennett's suicide attempts and Richard Bennett's eccentricities).

The early Bennett publicity in the '30s places her as "The Baby of the Bennetts," the quiet domesticated timid Bennett



who was not looking for stardom. She is described as the most stable; "the fiery temperament of the Bennetts is lacking in calm Joan . . ." (*Screenplay*); "Joan has carved a different life from the Bennett tradition of tempestuous arrogance and haughty glamour." Much of the early publicity claims that Joan was "too proud to trade on the reputation of her famous father" ("The Life of Joan Bennett") and that the Bennett name did not open any doors for her. (There are hints in the early press/publicity that Joan is a Bennett like Constance and Richard in relation to her divorces and marriages. Polly Playfair comments that she is a Bennett in the sense that she is "allergic to marriage . . . and the Bennetts are said to rival the Barrymores in this respect." This point in particular is repeatedly mentioned in the press accounts following the shooting.) Overall the early publicity glamorizes Bennett's show-business family background yet commends her for her stability and seriousness.

## JOAN BENNETT: THE MOTHER

**I**N AN ARTICLE ENTITLED THE "INSIDE STORY of Joan's Divorce" (from Gene Markey), the author George Benjamin notes,

Whenever Joan gave an interview, she did something that few actresses (thinking of their box office appeal) had the courage to do. She talked of her husband and her children . . . There is something infinitely appealing about Joan . . . the glamorous young movie modern also being Joan the girl-wife and girl-mother . . .

From early on in Bennett's career 'motherhood' becomes a major publicity point. Part of the myth explaining how Bennett came to be an actress (aside from her place within the Bennett family) is directly attributable to her being a mother. "Joan had to work to support the baby." (Being the independent woman she was, Joan wanted no alimony from her first husband, or financial support from her family.) The publicity in the '30s stresses Joan's domesticity, claiming she has never "gone Hollywood" and is not involved in love affairs/scandals/parties.

Much of Bennett's fan magazine publicity sells her as the young mother who looks more like her daughters' sister than their mother. Publicity photos show her at home with her daughters, reading to them. We are told how she is concerned about their education and "reads books on child psychology." In the Joan Bennett/Gene Markey 'home movies' (which at times look like 16 mm. studio publicity 'home movies') Joan is seen feeding and bathing her daughters, playing with them in the backyard pool and hostessing a lavish birthday party (attended by Shirley Temple, among others). In later publicity when her children are older, she shows them how to put on makeup and how to look glamorous.

At the same time many of the articles emphasize the children's strict upbringing: One notes how Bennett took her daughters through poor districts to see how the less fortunate live so that they will appreciate their own good fortune. Bennett claims that children are like "possessions"—they need "polishing" and it is a mistake to spoil them. The readers are told that Bennett honeymooned with Wanger at home so that she could keep the girls on their diets—"she's a stickler," the author notes.

Many articles contain Bennett's advice to her daughters and other young ladies. One magazine ran a contest soliciting questions asking for domestic advice where Bennett provided the answers, awarding the best questions a prize.

In the late '30s and early '40s (after her divorce from Gene Markey) a number of articles, still supportive, try to reconcile Bennett's being a mother and her history of divorce. Alyce

Canfield notes that Bennett admits her marital errors (i.e. she's 'honest,' 'human') and is concerned that her children not be adversely affected by the split. Eleanor Harris writes, "Everything a model mother shouldn't have are Joan's, from a career and two divorces to beauty . . ." yet the article proceeds to complement her for "managing." In an article entitled "My Children and their Mother," the author claims, ". . . it is unusual to find her a good mother because her history contains everything a juvenile court would scowl at . . . publicity ridden career as a famous star, two divorces . . . three husbands and beauty . . ."

Linked to claims that Bennett is a devoted mother is endless publicity about her domestic capabilities as a housekeeper (which overlaps with publicity regarding Bennett's beautiful home). Hill writes, "Joan somehow combines the qualities of being an alluring, captivating star and an excellent housekeeper as well . . ." Bennett often described herself as a "systematic, compulsive housekeeper" (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 104).

The publicity stresses that Bennett's career is never allowed to interfere with her primary domestic duties. In 1947 Bennett is named the most beautiful mother of '47 by the Hollywood Motion Pictures Mother's Congress. That same year an article appears by Alice Tildesley entitled "Efficiency Expert," where Bennett is crowned the most efficient star in Hollywood, outlining her domestic and work schedules. The purpose of this piece is twofold: It claims that mothers can straddle careers if they are organized (and wealthy) and underlines Bennett's overall image as being business-like, efficient and capable of actively participating in Diana Productions.

Bennett was later publicized as a grandmother, when at the age of 35, she married off her eldest daughter while she herself was pregnant. A few years later an article appeared entitled "Grandma Wore Shorts," displaying Bennett's still young and attractive body in shorts. Marlene Dietrich, another young Hollywood grandmother, sent her a telegram stating, "Thanks for taking the heat off."

All in all, the most consistent emphasis in all of Bennett's publicity is on her role as a mother first and foremost.

## ON LOVE AND MARRIAGE

**B**ENNETT'S FIRST BRIEF ELOPEMENT AND marriage to John Fox preceded her film debut and was forgiven as a mistake of youth (she was only 16). The first love relationship which received any Hollywood press attention was Bennett's losing courtship with John Considine, a Hollywood producer who dated both Bennett and Carmen Pantages and ended up marrying the latter. Gene Markey, a producer/dramatist, was Bennett's second husband and was 21 years her senior. The marriage lasted five years. (Wanger, her next husband/producer, was 18 years older than she. Louella Parson noted the parallel in a news clip following the Wanger/Bennett marriage). In "The Inside Story of Joan's Romance," George Benjamin, like other fan writers, tried to rationalize the break-up of a seemingly "ideal" marriage. Bennett matter-of-factly divorces Markey without any apparent good reason—he is not an alcoholic (like Fox) nor is he delinquent in any other way. Benjamin reports that Bennett, "always a realist," called her lawyer and told her press agent to release the news to the papers. It is a difficult divorce to explain. This is not a case of a wife outshining her husband as is often the case. Markey has "never suffered the title "Mr. Bennett" . . . He has never earned less than Joan . . . The explanation is, simply and bluntly, that Joan—who is said never to have been really in love with Gene, as he has been in



love with her—has found someone else. The 'someone else' is a big name in moviedom. Ironically, it seems as if Joan Bennett has not really been in love with either of the men she has married." Benjamin goes on to claim that the one true love Joan experienced was the man she lost, John Considine. ('True love' is never associated with marriage . . .) Benjamin does not blame Bennett and claims she tried to reciprocate Markey's devotion and even halted her career to bear him a child. "She had every outward reason to be happy. But always, despite all that she said in her interviews and tried to believe herself, something was missing from her happiness. In her heart of hearts, she did not have the love that every woman lives to have." Bennett offers her 'mea culpa' in her "My Daughter Won't Make My Mistakes" article stating "I won't mistake physical attraction for authentic and abiding love." *Movie Star Scoop* still insists that "Joan believes sincerely in the sanctity of marriage." One or two writers argue that this type of divorce reflects a sophisticated "modern" attitude. One piece entitled "No Sob Story" mentions how Joan shopped for Gene's bachelor apartment. In "Joan Bennett Faces the Future," D. Manners tries to place the divorce within a framework of acceptable norms and suggests a reason for the break-up of the "smart, young, modern, successful Noel-Coward-like couple." "Perhaps they were too sophisticated . . . (there were) not enough struggles that bind marriages so securely."

Many comment on Bennett's "calm collected" demeanor. "She is pleased that she will now be able to do a French play in Connecticut that she was previously not free to accept." One senses Bennett's pleasure when she regains her independence. In her autobiography, Bennett offers the following explanation:

. . . those were reasonably calm years for the Bennetts. Almost too calm for me. Professionally I wasn't particularly dissatisfied . . . Personally it was another matter. I had no apparent reason for dissatisfaction in that area either and, outwardly, it seemed quite perfect. My career was swinging along at a fast rate and steadily rising; Ditty and Mims were healthy and growing; Gene was a devoted husband. Inwardly, I was feeling something else. I couldn't account for my discontent, though I thought some of it could be laid to the fact that Gene's life and mine had settled into a kind of dull, lusterless routine. Little by little some sort of erosion set in and steadily and quietly wore away at our relationship. There was nothing tempestuous about our break; it was probably the warmest and most amicable parting in Hollywood history. (P. 253)

Joan's marriage to Walter Wanger followed shortly after. The press reported that Wanger's divorce was directly attributable to his romance with Bennett, but did not condemn the relationship and the couple were both popular with the public. Wanger and Bennett were 'an item' for at least a year before they rushed off to marry in Phoenix. The sudden unannounced marriage was instant publicity. Bennett was one of Wanger's "top flight" stars and "highly-prized cinematic properties." Wanger was a powerful producer serving as President of the Academy. The opinion was mixed as to who was pursuing whom. In her autobiography, Bennett claims that Wanger "pursued me with the same attention that he lavished on his other productions" (p. 261). A detailed report in *Silver Screen* on the sudden marriage noted "Joan has made no bones about the fact that she has been 'after' the popular young producer for some time. So when she married him in Phoenix, she sent the following wire to her mother in the East: It was a hard fight, maw, but I won."

Throughout Bennett's marriage to Wanger, they were publicly presented and described as an ideal couple—successful,

attractive, lovely home, lovely children, the right parties, admirable political/war endeavours etc., etc. There was no public suggestion of any marital problems until after the Lang shooting. (Even then, only a few of Bennett's close friends/supporters publicly claimed that Wanger had had numerous 'relationships' throughout the marriage.) Bennett attributed their marital problems to both personal problems (Wanger's affairs) and financial ones (Wanger's impending bankruptcy). The press admitted Wanger's financial difficulties and proceeded to blame Bennett for breaking up the family. Bennett remained legally married to Wanger until 1965, (it is unclear whether he would agree to a quiet divorce before this time), but they separated immediately and Bennett had two other serious relationships in the '50s and early '60s which she discusses in her autobiography.

Bennett's marriages provided her with a sense of financial and emotional security as well as a position of social status which she sought out and then rejected; the order and stability of the wife/mother's familial and domestic domain also curtailed and confined, and was progressively interrupted by desires repressed 'at home.'

## THE STAR AS CONSPICUOUS CONSUMER

IT HAS BEEN THEORIZED (BY DYER, AMONGST others) that a star's importance and success can be measured according to his/her ability to live and dress well—i.e. to afford and buy what every American wants to have. Again, this straddles the ordinary/extraordinary dualism that pervades stardom during the classic period: stars live like royalty/upperclass wealthy people but their homes/clothing/car/lifestyle basically reflect average American desires and aspirations. Stars are working people who have earned their place, yet they are special/lucky and privileged. There is evidence that suggests that Bennett was well aware of the significance of keeping up an image of success. Some of her financial tax statements in the '40s indicate that three quarters of her income was spent on clothing, maids, chauffeurs, etc., i.e. re-invested into her image as a star.

The Bennett as mother/hostess publicity is embedded within a plethora of articles/photo spreads of Bennett's home, her maids, her "chic" "sophisticated" clothing. The house on Mapleton Drive in Holmby Hills was being built just prior to the time that Bennett separated from Gene Markey. As Bennett herself explains:

I'd lived in a number of apartments and rented houses since my arrival in Hollywood, but for some time, I'd wanted a home of my own and had chosen a lot on Mapleton Drive in Holmby Hills on which to build a fourteen-room French Provincial house. It was a project that demanded a lot of attention, and I'd involved myself with builders, contractors, decorators, and all the attendant labors and pleasures of building a dream house.

(*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 256)

The publicity on Bennett's 'dream house' foregrounds its luxuriousness while stressing that it is a family home like any other. Bennett herself describes moving to the neighbourhood as being about to become "one of the landed gentry," yet an earlier publicity piece penned by Bennett for a fan magazine sprinkles a large photo-spread/story detailing the house's opulence with comments describing the home as being "informal," "livable" and "conducive to simple family life" . . . (with simple family winter evenings by the fireplace, etc.).

The house is notably French Provincial, which is part of the 'frenchicity' that pervades the marketed Bennett bourgeois wife/mother image. Her fans already know that part of Ben-



nett's upbringing included boarding school in France. Her home is filled with 'souvenirs' of Paris, (her chandelier is from France, her carpet runners on the staircase are in line with French custom), New York and New England (the latter also serving to support the image of sophistication and taste). Woodward notes in another fan article that Bennett speaks French to the maid (one of eight staff/servants). Her home, she writes, reflects a woman of "culture" and "intelligence." Bennett is able to appreciate "good things" since she has studied interior decorating and "loves French history."

The house decor is also delineated according to gender. "The entire house is extremely feminine in mood," except for her husband's bedroom/study and the dining room which is "masculine" in mood, "massive and formal, not at all like me, with hunting scenes and Chinese carpets." She notes that she had to change the colours in her bedroom when she became a brunette.

In addition to the main house, the children's yard includes their own bungalow as well as a dog's house. Bennett divulges her estimate of the value of her house (\$43,000), yet ends her article "and so we—my husband, my daughters and two Cocker spaniels live simply but comfortably on a tree-shaded drive in California," like any other middle-income American family.

Aside from Bennett's home/domestic space, the other outstanding characteristic reported was Bennett's luxurious wardrobe. In an interview with Hoover, Bennett comments that "an actress has to keep her youth . . . of necessity we take more interest in our clothes, in our figure, in our face." Bennett was noted for her clothing and model figure early on in her career (particularly emphasized when cast as a model in *Vogues of '38*). Bennett was called "the best-hatted movie mother," and her outfits were often part of her publicity. (In 1947 Bennett was included in Ray Driscoll's '10 best dressed list'). When Bennett was written up as Mrs. Walter Wanger, it is noteworthy that her clothing often signified luxury and opulence, which both reflected Bennett's status as a star and Wanger's financial status. "Santa Anita Park is a mecca for fashionably dressed women—catching all eyes: Mrs. Walter Wanger (Joan Bennett) in a suede suit and hat, 'lizagator' accessories topped by a full-length mink coat"; or a report on Mrs. Wanger's attendance at the Academy Awards dinner dressed in ostrich, fox and diamonds. Accompanying photographs show her dressing at home with the help of her maid.

At times the publicity coincides with the image of Bennett as the business-minded career woman. Virginia Wood writes of her severely tailored clothes, a comment which reflects a feeling of unease with Bennett's capable/in control character. The soft feminine attire that correlated with the blonde ingenue of the '30s changed into the sophisticated/tailored look of the noir/businesswoman/producer's wife of the '40s.

## THE BUSINESSWOMAN

**A**LL ASPECTS OF THE BENNETT PERSONA point to her ability to "manage"—her career, her household, her livelihood. As already noted, Bennett often commented on the fact that as an actress, she was marketing her self and had to maintain a certain image. In the '30s she confided to Paxton of *Modern Movies* that she knew the public tired of seeing the same face too often, so she didn't want to make more than eight pictures a year. As a woman who supported her daughter alone from a young age, Bennett was aware of the importance of 'budgeting' and of financial security. In her autobiography, she continues to support the mother image, commenting, "I started managing

the household on a shoestring, and if I do say so, I got to be fairly efficient at budgeting. At one point, I remember saving dimes in a small savings bank" (p. 115). This took place during her first brief marriage to John Fox, who, she claims, drank away their money.

It was often reported that Bennett's screen earnings built her Mapleton Drive home which was in her name. Wanger put the house up as collateral when producing *Joan of Arc*, and had a legal battle over it when he claimed bankruptcy. Bennett notes that the financial troubles significantly added to their "personal differences" in leading to the breakup of their marriage.

A major part of the Bennett image is her "efficiency" and her "serious" attitude toward the business of acting. She is portrayed as a working woman who hates wasting time and is not a "partier." The publicity of Bennett as the businesswoman is most profuse and concentrated around the time that she co-founds Diana Productions with her husband Walter Wanger and director Fritz Lang. Bennett's participation in Diana Productions was that of an active officer and not just as Mrs. Wanger or as a silent shareholder. Inter-departmental communications found in the company files indicate that Bennett had to be present to vote alone on all major decisions. Bennett even took the initiative to add new voice-over narration onto *Secret Beyond the Door* without director Fritz Lang's permission—it was a move which helped lead to the collapse of the company. Bennett's initiative in setting up projects is evident in her work outside of Diana as well. She approached RKO to produce and distribute *Woman on the Beach* directed by Jean Renoir.

In terms of publicity, Diana Productions capitalized on Bennett's position in the company. Photographs of her and interviews she gave stress her roles of star/business partner/vice president. Fritz Lang commented on his respect for "women's intuitive understanding, their efficiency and intelligence."

In 1947 A. Tildesley wrote an article entitled "Efficiency Expert" describing Bennett as being "the most efficient star in Hollywood," and outlining her tightly organized schedule. Other publicity photos at the time masculinize her image, showing her smoking in the library, wearing glasses and managing accounts. During this period Bennett endorses an Aerowax commercial about the woman who "can afford the best (but is) fastidious, discerning (and) recognizes real value."

All in all, the image of the capable, cool businesswoman did not seem to be socially acceptable; articles which praised Bennett for being active in her career and business stressed her uncompromising efficiency as a wife and mother. Her financial independence and business acumen were characteristics which transgressed gender expectations and were repeatedly berated in the press reports following the Lang shooting.

## PUBLICITY AND SCANDALS

**P**UBLICITY IS CENTRAL TO BUILDING A STAR image and all of the major studios in the '30s and '40s had salaried publicists and extensive publicity departments feeding a steady stream of guarded information and photographs to newspapers and fan magazines in the United States, Canada and abroad. A scandal that leaked out despite the powerful efforts of the studios often indicated the end of a star's career. The building of Bennett's star persona is anomalous in the sense that being unattached to a major studio for much of her career left her without this complex of manufactured news to keep her within public view. There is one notable exception which Bennett mentions in her autobiography. She attributes the growing success of her career in 1932 to a



publicity woman at Fox. In spite of a lot of "lightweight material . . . the public response to me seemed to grow with each release, and for much of my success at the time, I have to thank a marvelous publicity woman at Fox, Frances Deaner, who took a great interest in my career and went out of her way to advance it" (p. 224). Some publicity is attributable to the studio responsible for producing/distributing a particular film. During Bennett's years with Diana Productions, the company's publicist, Maggie Ettinger, took over. Although she remained a personal secretary and close friend for many years, it is unclear to what extent she continued to act as a publicist.

Despite this Bennett did manage to generate publicity. She took an active part in keeping herself accessible to the public, sometimes through publicity stunts which she orchestrated, other times through her marriages to important men in the industry, particularly Wanger. There are a number of instances where it is clear that Bennett lacked the powerful protection of a studio, and minor family/personal 'scandals' surface in the press. Finally, Bennett's career foundered on a public scandal that rivalled Lana Turner's Stompanato affair and shared elements with the more infamous Bergman/Rossellini scandal.

One of the earliest publicity stunts Bennett staged took place in 1929, when she was dating the producer/writer John Considine Jr. and found out that he was affianced to another woman. As she reports in her autobiography,

I chartered a plane, not a little private one, but what passed for an airliner in the 1930s, and was flown to Palm Springs, rattling around inside as the only passenger. Planes rarely flew at night in those days, but the pilot reached the desert town after sundown and the ground crew had to light flares on the runways so we could land. Once I found the offending parties, I presented them with a large piece of my mind, laid on a Bennett curse, and flew right back to Los Angeles. (pg. 209)

Needless to say, the event is covered in the press and is red-dredged after the Lang shooting (i.e. her supposed attempts to cause Considine to break his engagement which he didn't do . . . The event later served to testify to her early potential as a home-wrecker).

Another example of Bennett generating her own publicity took place around the release of *The Housekeeper's Daughter* in 1939. The film was advertised with the slogan, "She couldn't cook, she couldn't sew, but oh, how she could so and so!" Bennett took offence at the misleading innuendo and wrote protesting letters to 2,600 hundred women's clubs explaining her position and asking them to boycott the movie. She also threatened to sue the producer/director Hal Roach. Bennett did not succeed (though she did manage to have the story covered) and the studio was pleased with the free publicity for an otherwise unspectacular film.

Bennett's marriage to Walter Wanger, long expected by the public, was executed with a kind of orchestrated suddenness which seems pre-planned (however, this cannot be proved). Bennett claims Wanger pursued her and one evening,

in the midst of our chat, asked me to marry him. I thought there was no time like the present moment. Since Constance was touring on the road, I stopped only long enough to pick up my good friend Maggie Ettinger, and the three of us took a train to Phoenix. Walter and I were married there by a Justice of the Peace. (p. 273)

*Silver Screen* "Topics for Gossip" reports the event thus:

On a Wednesday Joan Bennett told several of her close friends that her romance with Walter Wanger was as cold as Greenland's icy mountains and that she never, never, never expected to see him again. On a Thursday night they had dinner at the

Beverly Brown Derby (just so she could tell him that she never, never, never expected to see him again) and right in the midst of the chef's salad, they decided to fly to Phoenix and get married. On a Friday they were married at the Arizona Biltmore. They left the Derby in such a rush that Wanger forgot to pay the check. When the waiter asked if the check should be sent to Mr. Wanger, Bob Cobb, who owns and manages the Brown Derbies, decided that such an important dinner should be "on the house."

Two days after the marriage some adverse publicity reached the press. Jack Fox, Joan's first husband (preceding Gene Markey) swallowed some sleeping pills, summoned an ambulance and told the police that "I don't like the idea of Joan being married to that other guy." Fox had also been married twice since the divorce and had a child by each wife. Bennett claims she arranged for Fox to be transferred to a private hospital (from the police receiving hospital) and engaged a private physician (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 273). The event was soon forgotten, but likewise was raised in the aftermath of the Lang shooting: "Fox's dramatic gesture brought no sympathy from his onetime love" (which helps fuel the 'Joan is cold, calculated, unemotional' image).

The final major publicity stunt which Bennett orchestrated took place in 1950, at a time when her career, arguably, was ebbing (one year before the shooting). It gels around her longtime "beef" with Hedda Hopper (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 255). In 1950 when Hopper visited the set of *Father of the Bride*, she witnessed Bennett's discomfort when having to do a scene in close-up around 6:30 p.m., at the end of a day's shooting. Hopper recalled a similar incident which occurred when she played Bennett's mother in *Vogues of '38* and had to do a close-up which Hopper wished to defer and Wanger insisted she do it the same day. After visiting the set Hopper wrote in her column, "At last Miss Bennett knows how it feels to get her close-up at the end of the day and not at the beginning." Bennett claims that she was upset with previous remarks in Hopper's columns, but finally decided to act after Hopper reported that Joan Fontaine (a friend of Bennett's) was drunk at a party she'd attended (which Bennett said was untrue). Harry Crocker, another columnist, printed an article about responsible reporting and wrote, "Hollywood realized ridiculous outbreaks are the result of her years of frustration as a jobless actress," but didn't mention Hedda by name (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 255). On Valentine's Day, 1950, Bennett bought two full-page ads in Hollywood's trade papers, *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*, reprinting Hopper's column and Crocker's side by side enclosed with a heart, headlining the page with "Can this be you, Hedda?" Later that day she had a live descended skunk delivered to Hopper's home. The latter told a newsman that she didn't think "the Wangers could afford the ad—I'm completely amused." She named the skunk Joan and gave it away to the James Masons.

The truth of the comment regarding Wanger's financial situation was public knowledge. In 1950-51 Wanger was close to bankruptcy following the failure of *Joan of Arc* and legal action was taken against Bennett's house. Joan contemplated work in a television series in New York at the suggestion of her agent Jennings Lang (though Wanger objected to their separation and Bennett remained in California), and Wanger, desperate for work, took a job with second-rate Monogram Studios.

## THE WANGER/LANG SHOOTING

**T**HE SHOOTING INCIDENT PROVIDED BENNETT with more press and publicity than she could ever desire or dream up, exposing and summing up the contradictions and ambivalences evident in the previous 20



years of her career. The reaction from the press was overwhelming. Bennett was advised by her lawyer to issue a statement to the press on the afternoon following the shooting. Bennett said she "hopes Walter will not be blamed too much," and attributes the shooting to his state of mental upset over financial difficulties and his bankruptcy proceedings following *Joan of Arc*. A few days later Lang issued a public statement claiming that Wanger "misconstrued what was solely a business relationship."

The press proceeded to elaborate upon the incident in endless serialized articles over a period of months, analyzing the Wanger marriage and Bennett's earlier marriages, her career, her family and her character. The general consensus (with sporadic dissent or abstentions) was in favour of Wanger. The "sonofabitch," as Wanger called him, was, in fact, breaking up an 11-year marriage and so deserved it. As one paper wrote, "public sympathy was with the distraught man who had used a gun to defend the sanctity of his home." Bennett, a married woman, was undoubtedly having an affair; papers printed pictures of where the "tryst" took place—neighbours raked through post-tryst garbage and left-overs. The evidence was conclusive.

The most talked about character trait that is repeatedly reported with considerable malice concerns Bennett's cool composure throughout the ordeal. In her autobiography, Bennett claims that midway through her questioning at the police department, Chief Anderson comments, "You're pretty cool about all this, aren't you?" She continues, "I don't know where he got that idea. I may have given the impression of coolness, but I felt as if I were sitting in the middle of a blast furnace. I told him, however, that if he thought I was going to break into hysterics for his benefit, he was very much mistaken" (p. 302).

*The Mirror* (4/1/52) reported: "What is this woman really like? Nothing so typifies the Joan that the public knows as her performance the night of the shooting . . . She appeared a woman of marble . . . unmarked by fears . . . frozen composure . . . costly dress unwrinkled, hair neat." The LA press that day described "the real Joan Bennett . . . a woman who had driven a man to homicidal frenzy and then coolly turned her back on him." Bennett's control was not only uncharacteristic of her gender, but also cheated the public of an emotional display which the situation warranted. *The New York Times* (12/28/51) was the only paper to report that Bennett was weeping and "her eyes were red." In *The Mirror*, Bennett's secretary was quoted as saying, "No one can tell me that she is cold, calculated or selfish."

The accusatory claims regarding Joan's marble-like control are linked to the suspicion that she has always acted in a "calculating" manner, and that she can manage without male help. There is still some ambivalence over whether this is good or bad for a woman; on the one hand, as K. Rochlen reports in a four-part series for *The Mirror* on the Bennett-Wanger story, "Joan has always supported herself and will work in a department store if she has to." On the other hand, if she paid more attention to her husband's needs, instead of "planning her career with her agent," Wanger's "ego" might have been saved.

Bennett "always knew what she wanted . . . Joan acquired her first husband, John Marion Fox, son of a millionaire Seattle lumberman, at sixteen. Fox was drunk and he struck her, the petite beauty told the judge . . . Once Joan sued for non support 'just for the principle of the thing'" (Rochlen, Part four). The reporter exaggerates Fox's wealth to imply that Bennett married because she was always a "gold-digger"; that her divorce did not have any actual grounds; that her suing for non-support underlines the fact that she was cold,

uncaring and only interested in amassing her money, which supports earlier publicity regarding her thrift and ability to "manage." The article continues that Joan "dumped" Fox in 1928 and that his suicide attempt (following her marriage to Wanger), described as a "dramatic gesture," "brought no sympathy from his onetime love."

Bennett was equally calculating and hardened in her other relationships. She was accused of causing John Considine to break his engagement (her chartering a plane is recalled) and "she told the courts of Markey's temper and told her friends that marriage and her career are not mixing . . . The ink was not dry on her interlocutory degree before her name was linked with her producer." Wanger was credited with saving her career, "rescuing her from the ingenue's grave" by casting her in sophisticated roles. (Rochlen, Part four). Other reports corroborate this attitude. The causes for the Markey divorce are linked to Bennett's claims that she had to party alone. (J. Stearn, "The Joan Bennett Story"). She eventually stopped because Wanger didn't like it either. (Earlier publicity claims the opposite: that Bennett was not a partier, etc.) Bennett's reasons for having children with Wanger were "to enlarge her family, giving her marriage a solid foundation. Wanger, nearly fifty, was not too keen. Joan's quiet determination gradually wore him down." The reason Bennett turned to Lang was because "he was climbing and Walter was slipping. Lang could do more for Joan as an actress than Wanger could . . . so she turned to him for advice and assistance." The Lang affair seemed to follow a Bennett pattern of using men to advance her ends, be it security in marriage, finance or in her career.

Bennett's domestic/motherly attributes were also recalled with ambivalence. An article in the *New York Times* (12/28/51) claimed that "the breath of scandal has never touched Joan, even after twenty-three years in the industry and sixty pictures. She had come to epitomize beauty maturing gracefully. Hollywood pointed with pride to the forty-one year old grandmother as an ideal example of a happy blend of family and career . . . four children, a twelve year marriage with Wanger . . ." Although this may indeed be part of what made the scandal so infuriating to the public, most papers did not admit that this image was ever firmly accepted. Although "Joan liked to see herself as a serious matron," Rochlen (Part four) lists Bennett's crimes: "three marriages, two divorces, one blighted romance, bitter feuds with gossip columnists, court battles . . ."

Many papers linked Bennett's behaviour to that of the famous Bennett clan. In a dramatic change from earlier publicity, Bennett's sins were noted as being inherited from her parents, her upbringing and sister Constance. Only Barbara is credited with "Un-Bennett-like domesticity." As *The Mirror* reported, all the Bennetts could be characterized by their "quick changes in matrimony, making money by the fistful, and splashing their names across the front pages of the nation." The articles imply that all the Bennetts married for money, were insincere, and sought out publicity. *The Mirror* (4/1/52) reported "Ten times and always with demure and lacquered smile the Bennett sisters have marched to the altar, usually with a man who was either rich, famous or titled." "For the last thirty years, with all the dexterity of theatrical queens who come warmly to life only when a hushed house is following every gesture and inflection—they have managed to stay Stage Centre." Rochlen (Part four) notes how "Life in a material sense was made easy for her . . . the best private schools . . . Joan had everything she wanted." Constance is described as being "blond and blasé"; Joan played "kitten" roles to "Connie's wildcat." Thanks to her father, Bennett "came to Hollywood with a signed contract." As J. Stearn



most viciously notes, "her father always encouraged his children, provided they could make a buck out of it."

The issue of money, comfort and ease in relation to stardom is double-edged. The public enjoys the display of opulence, but it shouldn't come too easily, or without personal cost. Throughout the reporting of the shooting and trial, the public was reminded that no matter how financially "ruined," Bennett was still a star and lived like one. Wanger was considered Hollywood "gentry" (Dick O'Connor) and the couple were described as once being "prince and princess." The woman with the frozen composure did not wrinkle her "costly dress" or ruffle her hair. She "clutched her mink (and) went home a broken woman" (LA press, 4/1/52). While one headline blared "Read her money worries," another imagined her returning home after the shooting thus: "Finally she went to her beautifully appointed peach and white boudoir, and threw herself on the huge canopied bed." As already noted, Wanger's financial difficulties in Hollywood were not news and were treated as a key element in instigating the shooting; "The millionaire producer, now broke and disgraced . . ." (after the failure of *Joan of Arc*), (Rochlen). Even more important, it seemed, was Bennett's response to her husband's bruised masculinity. The ambivalence toward Bennett as an independent businesswoman surfaced with a vengeance. While some duly reported that she was the sole support of her daughters and the family breadwinner who risked losing the family home over Wanger's bankruptcy, "It is no secret that she had been giving Wanger five hundred dollars a week 'walking-around' money." (Rochlen, Part four). In Part two, Rochlen reiterates that Joan was "a wonderful and devoted mother . . . a woman can only take so much and Walter's no shining knight. Joan spent close to one hundred thousand dollars on Walter," but, he goes on to say, "Others claim she dealt damaging blows to his ego by reminding him of it. (While) he was slipping she was planning her career with her agent . . . Wanger's masculine ego could scarcely have been expected to expand under these conditions." The onscreen image of Bennett as castrating ballbuster (*Scarlet Street*, *The Macomber Affair* etc.) reinforced the allegations.

The other central issue discussed was Bennett's guilt as the married woman having an affair, a part she had played many times onscreen. As in many movies, Wanger hired a detective to follow her and Lang and the evidence clearly supported the allegations. The fact that Wanger was far from "lily white" and "no shining knight," and was known to have had affairs with his protégées, etc., was disregarded as it is socially acceptable. (This was unspoken, unprinted Hollywood gossip; after the shooting, Pamela Mason intimated publicly that early on the marriage had been riddled with these problems.) As Rochlen noted, Lang was shot in the groin, because, as Wanger stated, "he was breaking up my marriage." Justice was being served.

Although Wanger premeditatedly waited for over an hour for the couple to return to the lot, and had threatened the couple before, his lawyer, Jerry Giesler, built a strong defence, supported by compliant witnesses and the fact that Wanger didn't mean to kill as bullets remained in his gun. Wanger entered a plea of "not guilty by reasons of temporary insanity" but later had the trial waived by agreeing to a reduced charge of "assault with a deadly weapon" (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 305). Wanger served three months, nine days, as a librarian in a prison farm and proceeded to produce a number of important films, including *Riot in Cell Block II*, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *I Want to Live*. The undiminished strength of Wanger's position in Hollywood is evidenced by the monumental and spectacularly expensive film he produced, *Cleopatra*, which not only finished Wanger off but threatened the

continuance of a major studio.

Bennett did not fare nearly as well. Her TV series was cancelled as her producers did not wish to risk losing public support. Although I've suggested that a woman in her 40s, reduced to playing peripheral mother roles, had a limited future in Hollywood, one could also claim that the Lang affair abruptly marked the end of her career. Bennett is quite convinced of this.

Without question, the shooting scandal and resulting publicity destroyed my career in the motion picture industry. Within a short time, it was painfully clear that I was a professional outcast in Hollywood, one of the "untouchables." I was excommunicated and evidence lies in the fact that before December 13, 1951, I'd made sixty-five films in twenty-three years, while in the decade that followed I made five. Suddenly I was the villain of the piece, the apex of a triangle that had driven my husband to a shocking act of violence. I might just as well have pulled the trigger myself. The movie business was still bound by an inviolable code of behavior. One simply didn't act like "that," though like "what" is still not clear. Had the incident occurred in the present day, I'd be quite fashionable, but then it was a different matter.

*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 306

To the public, Bennett managed to live up to her onscreen roles. Beneath the bourgeois mother/wife/star was a sexually volatile tramp who was emasculating, calculating and heartless. Middleclass morality was used as a cover for her transgressions. One writer recalled *Scarlet Street*, and changed the film's plot to suit his point:

In view of recent developments the plot seems mildly interesting—Joan plays the role of a wife who cheats on her husband. The husband, learning of his betrayal, takes the law into his own hands (and) finally ends a miserable wanderer.

The article goes on to note that Joan's children "urged her not to play such nasty parts—it made them uncomfortable."

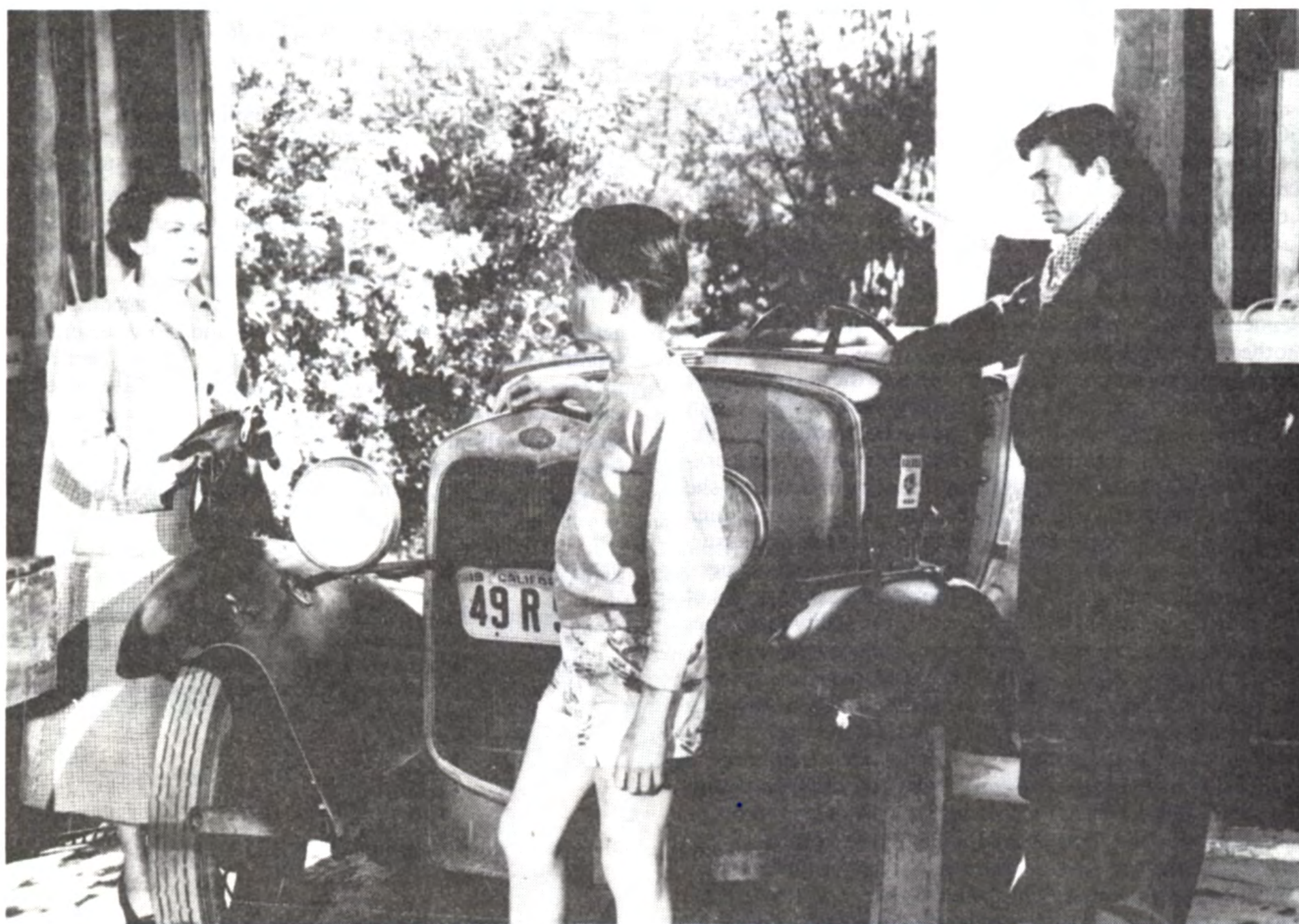
The Lang shooting crystallized the press and public's mixed feelings towards a successful career woman/wife/mother/star/'lady' who did not behave as a female should and whose overall star image was mixed and imprecise. Onscreen Bennett's image increasingly spoke of sexual desirability as well as cynicism, sarcasm, irony and intelligence/cleverness which lent a dangerous edge to her sexuality. As long as this persona was confined to the screen, the image could be more or less managed; in the social world there was no place for this manifestation of femininity. Bennett's sexuality offscreen was displaced onto her looking poised and attractive in expensive clothes and looking young for a mother of four; it could only be sanctioned in relation to her husbands. Stars are expected to get divorced and perhaps even to have affairs, but Bennett flagrantly broke too many generic rules. Beyond the affair was a femme fatale star who never effaced the fact that she was a mother, and a woman who was too self-sufficient, too controlled and altogether too threatening.

The overwhelming tensions resulting from the conflicting images of femininity which Bennett embodies are particularly apparent in the context of stardom and entertainment. This is an area where a variety of social pleasures and desires are evoked and are never altogether contained by dominant ideological concerns and demands.

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OPPOSITE—Two publicity stills for *The Reckless Moment*. Top: Joan Bennett/Lucia Harper confronts the 'underworld' in Los Angeles. Bottom: James Mason/Donnelly intrudes on the Harper family in Balboa.







I'M ENDING THE DISCUSSION WITH A BRIEF look at *The Reckless Moment* (1949), a film whose problematic is precisely that of Bennett: How does a wife and mother remain within the bounds of patriarchal law and satisfy needs and desires which ultimately transgress those same laws? The film clearly illustrates how masculine dominance and control is maintained; by desexualizing the image of the mother, and isolating her within the closed, sanitized world of the nuclear family, the woman's impotence in the social world outside of the home is assured. The bourgeois mother/wife is entrapped within the nuclear family, kept busy, exhausted and drained by the needs of those around her, to the point that she must give up her own. The ideal mother survives by exercising her limited powers within the place assigned her, repressing any desire for sexual freedom or power in the public domain.

The family/domestic realm is the only one where the wife/mother is expected to take charge (not financially, but in terms of household management and raising the children). She controls her children, her household staff and cares for the elderly. Her identity is evidenced in her home, her children's respectable upbringing, and in her clothing/jewelry. Her social status depends on the clean, orderly home and the scandal-free family, compulsions shared by both Mrs. Harper and Joan Bennett. The darker flip side of the mother's control in the domestic sphere is the image of the mother vampirizing her family—wanting too much control and taking too much. (The rash of "I-hate-my-mother" exposés and Bennett's *Dark Shadows* comeback are variations on the above.) The only person Mrs. Harper can effectively attempt to control is Bea—she passes on her mantle of oppression to the next in line (symbolically acted out through the movement of the fur coat from Mrs. Harper to her daughter).

*The Reckless Moment* is a transitional film in that it bridges the image of the '40s' sexual woman who may be attracted to another man, and capable of breaking genderic laws, to the '50' role of the boringly safe bourgeois wife and mother of teenage children, who is too pre-occupied with domestic problems to be interested in romance, love or sex. Because she is lacking in any expression of sexuality, she recedes into the background, becoming peripheral to narrative concerns (as in *Father of the Bride* [1950], *Father's Little Dividend* [1951] or *There's Always Tomorrow* [1956]). Mrs. Harper (like Joan Bennett) is an unusual woman; she is a 'happily' married mother of teenage children yet is also sexually attractive (not just respectably nice looking) and central to the narrative. The film presents a portrait of the seemingly perfect American wife, revealing the tensions and gaping contradictions lying beneath the cool, orderly exterior. Bennett's performance brilliantly evokes the character's steadily erupting underside—she is stiff, tense, controlled yet as explosive as a ticking time bomb. The only hints to her desperation and self-denial surface in her nervous cigarette-smoking and absent-mindedness; the character as played by Bennett foregrounds the layers of role-playing integral to femininity, and her inability to 'see' her entrapment within a larger oppressive social system.

Mrs. Harper concentrates all her efforts into maintaining the veneer of a responsible middle class wife and mother of a respectable family. By the end of the film she finds herself weeping over the death of a blackmailer whom she cares about deeply (Donnelly/James Mason), ready to expose and sacrifice all she has striven to protect, before once again repressing her desires for the good of the family and her husband. It is ironic that the film was released at the height of Bennett's public image of successful star/wife/mother, only two to three years before that image was publicly destroyed by scandal.

(Her marriage, by that point, was already marred by Wanger's infidelities and her increasingly personal relationship with her manager Jennings Lang. If not publicly acknowledged, these tensions were, nevertheless, already in place.) Mrs. Harper's attempts to save face and avoid scandal no matter what the cost—to herself or otherwise—brings together the tensions of Bennett's onscreen persona with that of the offscreen star in a prophetic manner. The portrait of the bourgeois wife entrapped by her home, her family, her position in the social world, her self-repression and her commitment to keeping up an image of propriety is perfectly captured by Joan Bennett—and no doubt, like Mrs. Harper, Bennett has little consciousness of the 'double' she embodies or of the desperate determination she brings to the part.

There are other parallels between the Bennett persona and the character Lucia Harper. Both are concerned with cleanliness, orderliness and controlling their daughters' identities. (I will only mention the sexual ramifications of these obsessions). (Consider "Mistakes My Daughters Won't Make," etc.) Both Mrs. Harper and Bennett are often compared to their daughters; Mrs. Harper is said to look like Bea and Darby comments that he expected someone younger. Bennett's youth and her looking more like a sister than a mother is also frequently mentioned. Mrs. Harper succeeds in containing Bea's potential sexual transgressions and ends up passing on the fur coat, (as noted, symbolizing Bea's appropriation of Mrs. Harper's powerless role in society). Bennett makes the following comment in relation to her daughter Ditty: "To-day she's married with a family of her own, quite content to be a devoted mother and compulsive housekeeper, traits that Ditty swears she got from me" (*The Bennett Playbill*, p. 298).

*The Reckless Moment* is the last film Bennett made where she is portrayed as being sexual and having desires of her own outside of the marriage/family. The film taps into and prefigures an impending breakdown in terms of Bennett's public image and private life. It also signals the larger social arena and the traumas of repression and sublimation on a national level, heralded by the '50s. The migration to suburbia further removed women from social activity (Balboa is safely separate from Los Angeles). They became objects of extensive domestic marketing campaigns aimed at building up a depressed economy and serving to consolidate the woman's confined place within the home and the family.

There is no question that Bennett was an accomplished actress—yet one senses that both she and the director Max Ophuls brought to Mrs. Harper a part of Joan Bennett; a protagonist who elicits empathy from every spectator who has ever been a victim of masculine dominance. This is, perhaps, what I like about Bennett's persona most of all; she conveys the tensions of a woman trying to be successful and fulfilled in a society that renders this activity virtually impossible. □

## ENDNOTE

1. I found many of the fan articles on Joan Bennett in the Wanger collection and in publicity files on Joan Bennett housed at the University of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, many of these were yellowed clippings without full information regarding their sources, hence my incomplete footnoting of this kind of information.



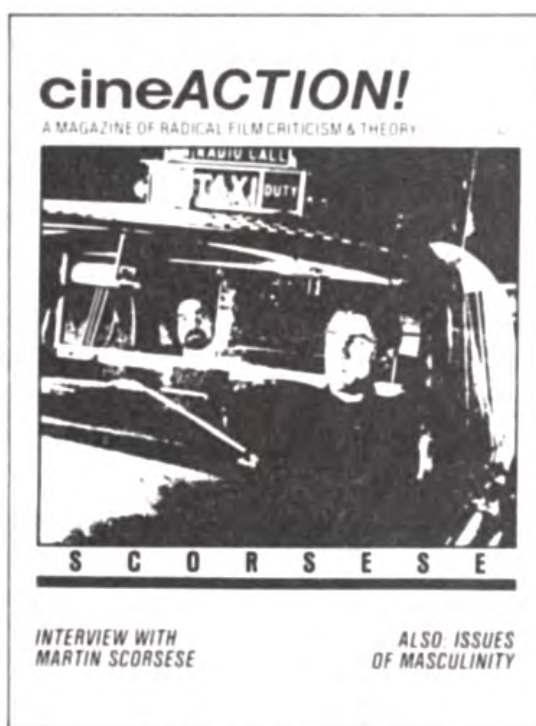
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*Monkey Business: Cary Grant with Marilyn Monroe.*



# Cary Grant:

## COMEDY AND MALE DESIRE

by Andrew Britton

*IT SHOULD BE SAID AT THE OUTSET*, in explanation of the method of this essay, that I wish to be concerned with the functions and thematic content of the Cary Grant persona; what follows is neither an account of Grant as a performer, nor a biography or history of his career.

Obviously, much might be written on the subjects I have chosen to ignore. A theoretical interest in modes and traditions of performance could find no more complex and rewarding theme than comic acting in the popular American cinema; and in Cary Grant we have a striking, and highly specific, conjunction of diverse European and American comic conventions—British music-hall, American vaudeville and variety, and the line of sophisticated comedy initiated by Lubitsch. For an historian of the star system and its evolution, the details of Grant's career would have their significance. Grant was the first major star to go 'independent': after his contract with Paramount expired in 1937, he was never again under exclusive contract to any studio, and was centrally involved in the selection of his material and collaborating personnel.

The first of these subjects seemed to raise issues too large to be dealt with profitably in a short monograph on a single actor: the responsible discussion of performance (discussion, that is, radically unlike the familiar kind) would have demanded an attention to its contexts and lineage, and a range of comparative reference, which lie beyond the scope of this essay. The second, on the contrary, threatened either to narrow or to blur the focus: it acquired a secondary importance beside the things which it seemed to me most necessary to say about Grant.

These things concern definitions of masculinity, the use of comedy to criticize and transform traditional gender roles, and the extent to which characteristics assigned by those roles to women can be presented as being desirable and attractive in a man; and I have chosen, accordingly, to concentrate on specific films and on Grant's meaning as the hero of them.

I would like to thank Robin Wood and Richard Lippe, who provided me with hospitality while I was writing this essay, and who read the first draft and made a number of very helpful suggestions. I dedicate the essay to them.  
—A.B.

**T**HERE IS A TENDENCY TO ASSUME THAT THE great stars are a known quantity. In an attempt to account for the appeal of Cary Grant, David Shipman writes:

It is his elegance, his casualness, his unaccented charm; he is, as Tom Wolfe put it, "consummately romantic and

consummately genteel"—"the old leathery charmer", in Alexander Walker's words (regretting his earlier, more interesting existence as a "hard-eyed cad"). It certainly isn't from acting ability: his range must be the most limited of all the great *matinée* idols. His gift for light comedy has been much touted, but it's been a mite heavy at times and one can think of half a dozen names who were sometimes better.

Shipman, 1970

That is probably representative. The "limited range" needn't detain us: the assumption involved is so clearly that which inspires Pauline Kael to remark that "one does not necessarily admire an icon, as one admires, say, Laurence Olivier, but it can be a wonderful object of contemplation," and to suggest that Grant "might have become a great actor" if he had "taken more risks like *None But the Lonely Heart*" (Kael, 1980, p. 25-6). But the "charm" and the "romantic" obviously call for comment, and it may be useful to begin by emphasizing an aspect of them which is habitually ignored. Consider the dialogue of the love scene on the train in *North by Northwest*.

EVE: This is ridiculous. You know that, don't you?

THORNHILL: Yes.

EVE: I mean, we've hardly met.

THORNHILL: That's right.

EVE: How do I know you *aren't* a murderer?

THORNHILL: You don't.

EVE: Maybe you're planning to murder *me*, right here, tonight.

THORNHILL: Shall I?

EVE: Please do. (*They kiss*)

THORNHILL: Beats flying, doesn't it?

EVE: We should stop.

THORNHILL: Immediately.

EVE: I ought to know more about you.

THORNHILL: Oh, what more *could* you know?

EVE: You're an advertising man, that's all I know.

THORNHILL: That's right. Oh, the train's a little unsteady.

EVE: Who isn't?

THORNHILL: What else do you know?

EVE: You've got taste in clothes, taste in food—

THORNHILL: Taste in women. I like *your* flavour.

EVE: And you're very clever with words. You can probably make them do anything for you . . . sell people things they don't need . . . make women who don't know you fall in love with you . . .

THORNHILL: I'm beginning to think I'm underpaid.

The sense of an ironic lack, or refusal, of intimacy which this communicates is an inflection of something which is, in fact, characteristic of Grant's love scenes, and of his playing of them. Hitchcock, characteristically, takes the exchange of sophisticated wit to the verge of the unpleasant: Thornhill's self-regarding self-possession is assimilated, on the one hand, to the economic values of Madison Avenue, and on the other to an irresponsible male sexual consumerism. In retrospect, of

**This monograph was originally published by Tyneside Press in 1984. It is reprinted with the author's permission.**



course, the irony is complicated by our discovery of who Eve is, but the revelation that Thornhill's feeling of urbane mastery in the love scene is illusory doesn't alter the fact that it is there to be cultivated. Indeed, it is the crux of the irony that prior to Eve's deception of him (which, unlike his own sexual confidence, isn't inspired by egotism) Thornhill has told her that "honest women frighten (him)."

The use to which Hitchcock puts Grant here isn't unprecedented. In his fifth film, *Blonde Venus* (Sternberg, 1932), Grant plays a wealthy businessman who uses Helen Faraday/Dietrich's need for money to make her become his mistress. Two films later, he was cast as Pinkerton in a version (non-musical!) of *Madame Butterfly* (Gering, 1933). In *Sylvia Scarlett* (Cukor, 1935), he plays a confidence trickster who appears, at the outset, to embody for Sylvia/Katharine Hepburn the promise of liberating adventure, but who is gradually revealed to be cynically exploitative. In *Indiscreet* (Donen, 1958), Philip Adams pretends to Anna Kalman/Ingrid Bergman that he is married and unable to obtain a divorce so as to keep her as his lover while avoiding a substantial commitment to her. *Suspicion* (1941) and *Notorious* (1946), the first two of Grant's four films with Hitchcock, fully elaborate this aspect of the persona, subordinating it entirely to the director's thematic concern with the male need to possess and subjugate female sexuality. In the Devlin of *Notorious*, sexual egotism becomes an extraordinarily convoluted misogyny—Devlin seeks to turn Alicia/Ingrid Bergman into a whore so that he can then despise her for being one—and imagery and narrative movement link the romantic hero directly to his antagonist, Sebastian/Claude Rains: the film begins with Alicia's relapse into alcoholism in response to Devlin's refusal to trust her, and ends with Sebastian's attempt to poison her. Like his counterpart, Mark Rutland/Sean Connery in *Marnie*, Devlin can only accept the heroine when she has been reduced to a state of complete emotional and physical prostration. The long-take kissing sequence, with its disturbingly impersonal sensuality (it anticipates the train sequence in *North by Northwest*), is usefully emblematic of these things. Asked by Devlin to explain her remark that "this a very strange love affair," Alicia replies—"Perhaps because you don't love me."

It is not merely perverse to preface an account of Grant by noting a use of him which no one will argue to be fully characteristic. What these roles have in common is an urbane amorality and irresponsibility, issuing in the exploitation of women; but "irresponsibility"—which turns out to be a key word in discussing Grant—can be defined in more than one way, and Grant is not only a lover-figure, but also a comedian. In *Notorious* and *Suspicion*, irresponsibility appears entirely negatively, as sexual opportunism, and Alicia and Lina/Joan Fontaine are subtly complicit with their exploitation. Significantly, both women initially see the Grant character as a means of detaching themselves from, and rebelling against, fathers they hate, only to discover that they have become subject to another form of patriarchal oppression, to which they then succumb out of masochistic fascination (Lina) or a self-contempt which the man relentlessly exacerbates (Alicia). The Hitchcock films are distinguished from, say, *Indiscreet*, by the absence of the comedy of male chastisement: Donen's film really takes off, after its turgid exposition, when Anna discovers that she has been deceived and sets about exacting retribution. And it is in general true that when, in comedy, the Grant character is closest to the cynical emotional detachment and exploitativeness of Devlin, he is partnered by an active heroine who contests the terms of the relationship between them and undertakes his 'spiritual education.'

"The comedy of male chastisement"—Grant's movies are

full of scenes in which he is subjected to the most extreme discomfiture, humiliation and loss of face by women. *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) and *I Was A Male War Bride* (1949) are obviously the most excessive cases—Hawks takes the persona as far in this direction as Hitchcock does in the other—but examples could be multiplied. Consider the magnificent sequence in *The Awful Truth* (McCarey, 1937) in which Lucy Warriner/Irene Dunne, masquerading as her husband's sister, discredits him in front of his new fiancée and her upper-class family; or the sequence in *Mr. Lucky* (Potter, 1943) in which Dorothy Bryant/Laraine Day compels Joe Adams/Grant to join a group of women war-relief workers and learn to knit while male passers-by gradually gather, astounded, at the window; or the moment in *Houseboat* (Shavelson, 1958) in which Tom Tinston/Grant, immaculately attired for work, finds the gang-plank of the houseboat slowly subsiding beneath him, to the delight of Cinzia/Sophia Loren and his children.

Given that the comedy of moments such as these is so often bound up with the undermining of masculinity, or at the least, of male prestige and dignity, it is remarkable that the comedy is never hostile, and that since the Grant character is not ridiculed, the sense in which he appears ridiculous is a complex one. It is partly a matter of the loss of dignity being continuous with the loss of qualities which have no positive value whatever: the social world of the Vances in *The Awful Truth*, and the diplomatic milieu of *Houseboat*, are rejected by the films. At the same time, Grant's acting characteristically conveys an ironic distance from, or pleasurable complicity with, his degradation: at first appalled and embarrassed by Lucy's eruption into his fiancée's home, Jerry is more and more delighted by it, and *Bringing Up Baby* ends with David Huxley/Grant's admission that the day he spent with Susan/Katharine Hepburn was the most wonderful of his life. Here, loss of dignity involves the acquisition of a kind of irresponsibility which is very different from the kind Grant embodies in *Suspicion*.

Discussion can be focused by referring in greater detail to the great comedies of the late '30s: the first of them, *The Awful Truth*, clinched Grant's status as a major star. McCarey's film begins with Jerry Warriner stretched out under a sun-lamp at his club, trying hastily to cultivate the tan which his wife will naturally expect him to have acquired during a supposed visit to Florida. Jerry's deceit of her is accompanied by the conviction (quite unfounded) that Lucy has been unfaithful to him, and in the ensuing recriminations the two agree to divorce. If Jerry's combination of possessive jealousy and duplicity is viewed negatively, his ebullience appears in a more favourable light in comparison with Lucy's new suitor, Daniel Leeson/Ralph Bellamy, who may be described with every propriety as 'straight.' Daniel offers Lucy a conventional respectability and probity, and a conventional sexual role: he treats her with deeply-felt but laboured gallantry and deference, which will be her reward for uncomplaining acquiescence in the duties of a wife. But while Jerry and Daniel are sharply distinguished from each other, they have in common a refusal to trust Lucy which is rooted in two opposite but complementary forms of masculine complacency. Jerry takes for granted his own right to a life independent of his marriage, and to lie to Lucy about it, but swells with proprietary indignation when Lucy claims the same right for herself. Daniel, in turn, assumes that Lucy can have no desire which life with him cannot satisfy. His sentimental chivalry is the counterpart of Jerry's insincerity, and each conceals a possessiveness which denies any freedom or autonomy to Lucy herself and is all too ready to conclude that she has 'broken her trust.'

The action of the film consists in the comic correction of



Jerry's insincerity and the comic confirmation of his energy: the function of the comedy, that is, is to distinguish between, and evaluate, two forms of 'irresponsibility.' The insincerity, and the associated proprietoriness, express a conviction of male sexual right, and correction takes the form of loss of face. Consider the sequence in which Jerry, convinced yet again that Lucy is having an affair with her singing teacher, Armand Duvalle/Alexander D'Arcy, bursts into Duvalle's apartment only to discover that Lucy is singing, to Duvalle's accompaniment, before a large audience. Jerry attempts to save the situation by taking a seat at the back of the room, but is further confounded when the chair collapses; and Lucy, delighted by his humiliation, converts the closing phrase of her song into a gentle laugh of triumph.

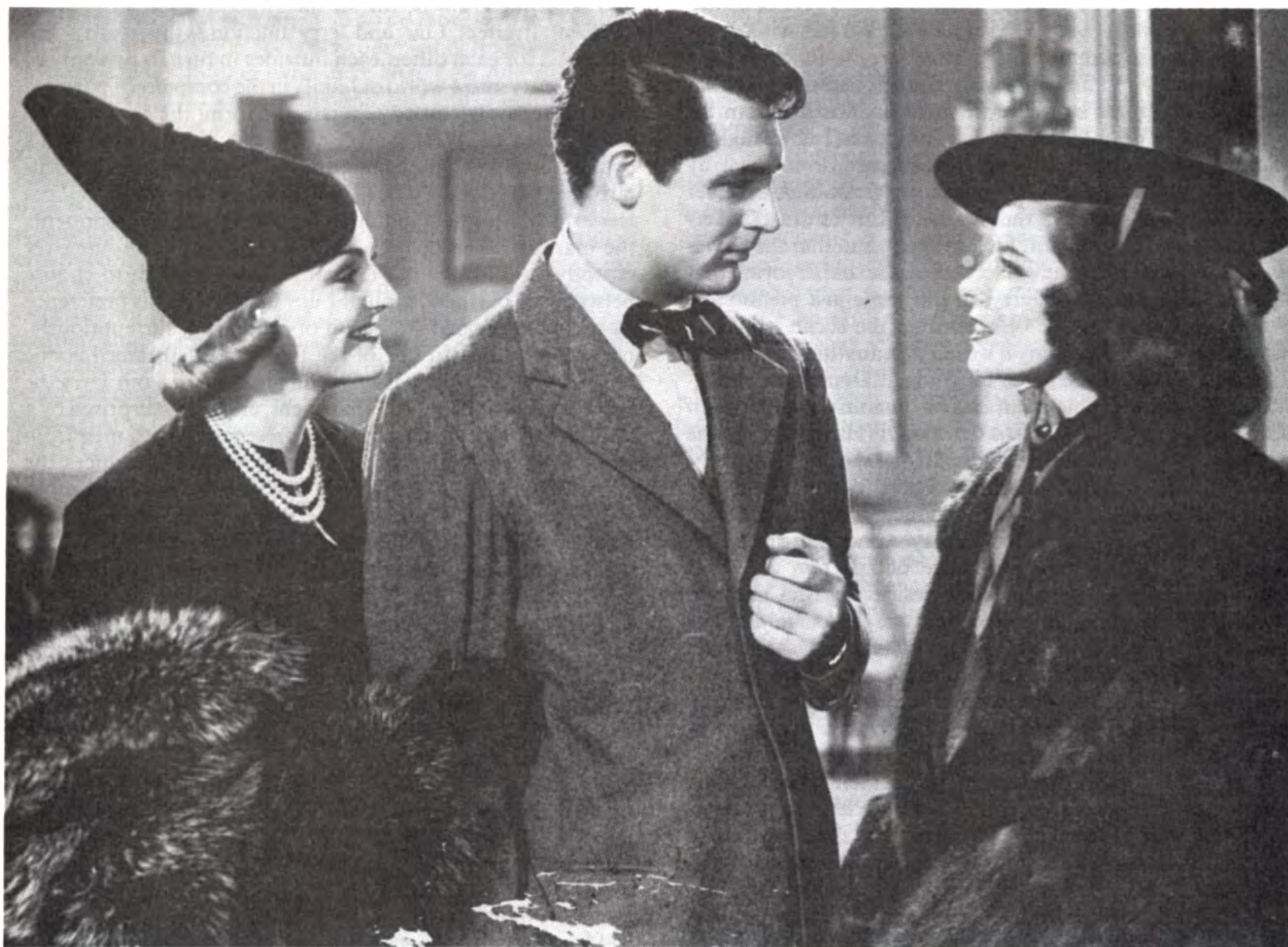
If *The Awful Truth* chastises male presumption and opportunism, the energies it affirms are energies which Jerry shares with Lucy. Masculinity, as Ralph Bellamy invaluablely embodies it, is presented, in that unadulterated form, as stolid, lumpish and boring, and his peculiar relationship to energy is given us in his performance on the dance floor and his rendering of "Home on the Range." The tone of the reference to the Western is crucial, both to an understanding of screwball comedy and to the significance of its supreme male practitioner. The West, where definitions of masculinity are concerned, traditionally provides the norm of potency, and derives its meaning from its opposition to 'settlement' and 'civilisation'—the domesticity which, in American culture, is synonymous with the oppressive power of women and which

threatens the male with emasculation. *The Awful Truth* retains one part of this opposition and reverses the other. Civilisation is still associated with femininity, but it appropriates from the West the free play of anarchic energy, and the Western hero appears as the spokesman of repression, propriety and constraint.

To say no more would be, of course, to simplify. 'Civilisation' in *The Awful Truth* is also the Vances, just as, in *Holiday* (Cukor, 1938), it is the Setons and in *Bringing Up Baby* the dinosaur, and it is an essential characteristic of the couples created at the end of these films that they cannot exist in established bourgeois society: *The Awful Truth* ends in a snow-bound ski-lodge in the mountains, *Holiday* on a liner between America and Europe, and *Bringing Up Baby*, most drastically of all, on a rickety scaffolding with the dinosaur, the film's central image of bourgeois patriarchy, lying in ruins beneath it. If *The Awful Truth* recognises the enabling possibilities of civilisation, it also perceives that what is enabled is incompatible with civilisation as it is, and indeed, expresses itself in defiance of it: Lucy's disruption of the Vances' dinner-party, Linda/Katharine Hepburn's departure from her father's house (*Holiday*) and Susan's destruction of the skeleton (*Bringing Up Baby*) have obvious points in common.

'The enabled' is, in each case, a revision of bourgeois gender roles: it is the Grant character's commitment to, and acquisition of, a subversive 'femininity,' and the consequent redistribution of power within the couple, which makes the couple socially impossible. In each case, too, femininity partakes both

Doris Nolan, Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn in Cukor's *Holiday*, 1938.





of civilisation and of the drives which civilisation alienates. Femininity in *Bringing Up Baby* is not only the leopard but also Miss Katharine Hepburn, New England heiress, Bryn Mawr graduate and notorious representative of high-toned culture. The anarchic energies released in these films do not subserve a fantasy of regression to a pre-cultural stage, and have nothing in common with that model of the return of the repressed enacted by the Gothic, shared by Freud, and leading both, finally, to stalemate. We may feel that a return of the repressed is involved, but it doesn't have the suggestion of 'dark primal forces' which so often accrues to the monster in the horror film, and which allows the genre to rationalise the reinstatement of repression. If the 'femininity' which erupts in *The Awful Truth*, *Holiday* and *Bringing Up Baby* is inimical to the society it disturbs, it is also associated, as is usual in the American tradition, with sophistication and refinement; and this dual character makes the repressed that returns not the monstrous inhabitant of the "seething cauldron of excitements" (Freud's own phrase) which precedes social life, and on whose containment social life depends, but the harbinger of a more free and pleasurable culture.

I have noted that, as regards Jerry, the comedy of *The Awful Truth* has two distinct functions, and it will be obvious that, throughout the film, he and Lucy visit humiliation on *each other*. Jerry's insincerity and negative irresponsibility are very much a part of the world of the Vances in which he figures as urbane and eligible male, and in which the aspects of sophistication to which the film is opposed are concentrated, and the scenes of which he is the butt serve to chasten his presumptuous possessiveness of Lucy (the concert) and to expose, and detach Jerry from, the ethos in which insincerity is a constituent of urbane form (Lucy's masquerade). Yet it is what Jerry and Lucy have in common that allows Jerry to function as he does in Lucy's relationship with Daniel Leeson, and that makes the hilarious sequence in which, concealed from his rival behind a door, Jerry repeatedly makes Lucy laugh at Daniel's heart-felt recitation of his doggerel love-poem by tickling her under the arm, so unlike an exercise of power over her. It is always apparent that Daniel is Lucy's drastic over-compensation for what is at fault in Jerry, and that she recognises, and resists, from the outset the staid sexual decorum that Daniel brings with him. Jerry, in the scene just mentioned, evokes Lucy's own sense of absurdity: the scene would be distasteful rather than funny if we felt that anything more than politeness was involved in *not* laughing at Daniel's poem.

The substance of this point can be demonstrated by comparing *The Awful Truth* and *His Girl Friday* (Hawks, 1939), the thematic parallels being so close: Hawks' film is another comedy of re-marriage in which, again, the marriage has broken up because of the Grant character's irresponsibility, and in which the alternative man is played once more by Ralph Bellamy. The astonishing brilliance of *His Girl Friday* is legendary, but merely to place it beside the McCarey (or *Bringing Up Baby*) is enough to reveal the drastic limitations summed up neatly by Robin Wood: "Given the alternatives the film offers, the only morally acceptable ending would be to have Hildy walk out on *both* men; or to present her capitulation to Walter as tragic" (Wood, 1981, p. 77). Walter Burns, of all Grant's comic characters, is the closest to Devlin, but while in *Notorious* the loathsomeness of the character is clearly and consistently the issue, in *His Girl Friday* it isn't, and by the time we get to "Stick Hitler on the funny pages!" the confusion of attitude could hardly be greater. The confusion is generated by the transportation of the asocial male group of the Hawksian adventure film into the bourgeois world of the comedies, and by Hawks' inability to decide whether the group is implicated

in that world or an answer to it. The indecision is reflected in the treatment of Hildy/Rosalind Russell. She is hardly a representative Hawks comic heroine: Bruce Baldwin would have to be played by Cary Grant rather than Ralph Bellamy to make *that* of her. At the same time, because Hawks does not really know what he thinks of the values of the group, he is unable fully to endorse the theme of the heroine's assimilation to it characteristic of the adventure films. Hildy's withering "Gentlemen of the Press!", in the aftermath of the journalists' brutal harassment of Mollie Malloy/Helen Mack, implies a definitive judgement on the group to which the film gives great weight, but from which it is entirely unable to follow through.

The particular material of *His Girl Friday* deprives the male group of its value as a positive alternative to bourgeois society while also demanding a reconceptualisation of the comic function of the Hawks heroine which Hawks is unwilling, or unable, to undertake. For if Walter Burns scarcely needs to have alienated energy liberated, he is very much a candidate for the correction of male arrogance and complacency. Walter is obviously exploiting Hildy, and *His Girl Friday* demands, uniquely in Hawks' comedies, an *explicitly* political, and *explicitly* feminist, development of the theme of the woman's education of the hero. Such a development is hardly conceivable, and Hawks responds by producing a Hawks comedy in reverse: the film traces the process by which Hildy is worn down into submission, and ends, astonishingly, after she has been reduced to tears, with her following Walter out of the Press-room weighed down by baggage which he refuses to help her carry.

The process by which Lucy is detached from Daniel Leeson in *The Awful Truth* is, for all the structural similarity, very different. In effect, Lucy and Jerry function as the return of the repressed for each other: each intrudes in turn to prevent the other's entry into a world of family in the company of partners who respectively embody, in parodic form, the accumulated associations of 'West' and 'East.' That much of the film's comedy consists in the dramatisation of repression is particularly clear in McCarey's use of Mr. Smith, the Warriners' pet terrier. Mr. Smith, standing in for a child, clearly represents the marriage. The divorce hearing ends with a dispute over custody, and Mr. Smith is unable, when invited, to choose between the partners, though Lucy finally wins his preference by the underhanded stratagem of producing, surreptitiously, his favourite toy. In one of the film's most sustained comic set-pieces, Lucy finds herself having to conceal from Jerry the fact that Armand is in the apartment, and then, surprised by a visit from Daniel, to conceal the presence of both men from *him*. Having hidden the men themselves, Lucy notices the compromising presence of their bowler hats, and throughout the sequence Mr. Smith, with pertinacious insistence, and to Lucy's increasing discomfiture, repeatedly retrieves the hats from their hiding-place, to return with them, and the threat of scandal, to the parlour. The sequence ends with the eruption of Jerry and Armand from concealment, and the besmirching of Lucy's reputation which puts an end to her relationship with Daniel. The comedy is beautifully succinct: Mr. Smith, as emblem of the marriage, acts through the submerged logic of Lucy's 'forgetting' of the hats and realises her desire to check the onset of domesticity.

The use of Mr. Smith both as symbol of the Warriners' union and as focus of the comedy of repression is crucial to the significance of *The Awful Truth*. In not being a child, but replacing one, Mr. Smith dissociates the marriage from reproduction, or the prospect of it—a function fulfilled even more strikingly in Asta's next incarnation, as George in *Bringing Up Baby*, where he actually deprives David of the phallus by



burying his "old bone" in the garden, thus fulfilling David's unexpressed desire to stay at Susan's farm and to fail to complete the skeleton of the dinosaur (I will return to the sexual symbolism of Hawks' film in greater detail later). Indeed, far from *representing* a child, Mr. Smith (again, like George) seems at once to express and to provide an occasion for a kind of childlikeness in the couple. Consider the sequence in which Jerry and Daniel first meet at Lucy's apartment. As Daniel and Lucy talk about the divorce, Jerry romps boisterously on the floor with Mr. Smith, and Lucy responds to Daniel's evident surprise at such behaviour by remarking merely, with a marvellously off-handed drop of the wrist, that *that* is her husband. *Bringing Up Baby* gives us an exactly analogous moment. Susan's aunt, believing David to be a big-game hunter, discovers him chasing after George through the shrubbery in a desperate search for the missing bone, and on asking Susan, in astonishment, if that is what David understands by big-game hunting, receives the reply that "David is playing with George." Both incidents turn on a discrepancy between the behaviour of the Grant character and a conventional paradigm of masculinity ('the West' and Hemingway machismo respectively), and in both cases the fact that the discrepancy also involves an opposition between the liberation of energy and its constraint gives to 'playing with the dog' a strong positive connotation. Masculinity appears here as a code learned from the book of myth, and we are invited to laugh at the decorous inhibitedness of the student.

Juxtaposing the central couples of *The Awful Truth*, *Bringing Up Baby* and *Holiday*, we see that ideas of 'play' and the 'childlike' are fundamental to all of them, and that in each case play is directly linked to a rebellion against patriarchal sexuality. I have analysed *Holiday* at length in my book on Katharine Hepburn (Britton, 1983), and will do no more here than point to the significance of the play-room, and its association, through Linda's mother (who died, Ned/Lew Ayres tells us, trying to be a good wife), with oppressed and liberating non-phallic sexual energy. The principle of all three films is to identify 'play' in the sense of recovered infantile polymorphousness (which is, effectively, the meaning of 'screwball') with 'sophistication,' the apogee of cultivated adulthood. The sophisticated couple is the couple whose sexuality is no longer organised by the phallus. The characteristic co-presence in these works of the two apparently distinct comic modes of farce and wit is the expression of this thematic principle. The partners engage in rough-house and in epigram and repartee; the anarchic consorts with the urbane; the infantile drives which precede maturity and civilisation are suddenly definitive of them.<sup>1</sup>

The Grant characters in these films can be distinguished by virtue of their precise relation to these drives. In *Holiday*, they unite Linda and Johnny from the start: Linda's commitment to the playroom and Johnny's to his holiday represent two parallel forms of 'irresponsibility,' the alignment of which, as the film progresses, gradually defines play equally as non-phallic desire and as the refusal of alienated labour. In *Bringing Up Baby*, Susan is David's liberator: the hero's polymorphous energies have been entirely repressed, and the male ego must be destroyed in order to release them. *The Awful Truth* embodies a kind of middle term, in that the hero's education involves the correction rather than the liberation of energy. The films are united, remarkably, by their affirmation of a feminised hero, and of a couple whose validity and vitality is continuous with his feminisation. Hawks' film, as the most extreme of the three, demands closer consideration here: the way in which it redefines a process which we might be tempted to describe as 'emasculatation' is fundamental to our sense of the value of the Grant persona.

*Bringing Up Baby* begins with Professor David Huxley on the verge of final and complete assimilation to a world of 'order' which is defined in terms of three interdependent characteristics.

(1) A particular concept of reason, logic and rational inquiry, the sterility and obsolescence of which are already implied by its being dedicated to the reconstruction of the skeleton of a brontosaurus: as Susan later remarks of the intercostal clavicle, "it's only an old bone." As the film progresses, this model of reason is increasingly generalised so as to refer to a whole organisation of the ego. David's consciousness and sense of self are entirely bound up with his status as a scientist.

(2) Bourgeois marriage. David's imminent marriage to Alice Swallow/Virginia Walker is immediately linked to the dinosaur through David's remark, on receiving the telegram announcing the discovery of the missing bone, that it's so marvellous that "two such important things should happen on the same day." Alice tells David that their marriage will have "no domestic entanglements of any kind"; and while he goes on to mention having children, it is sufficiently clear, even if one doesn't know either Hawks' work or the genre, that what is at issue is not reproduction but sexual pleasure. The marriage will be "purely dedicated to your work"—that is, to the repression and alienation of sexual energy.

(3) Capitalism. David's rational inquiry is to be funded by a million dollar grant which he must devote himself to extracting from the legal representative of Mrs. Carlton-Random/May Robson, the benefactor.

The brontosaurus is the film's inclusive image for this world. Later, casting round desperately for an incognito for David, Susan settles, with perfect accuracy, for "Mr. Bone." He is about to enter patriarchy, and his destiny will be to perpetuate it.

The whole meaning of *Bringing Up Baby* turns on the evidence, in the opening sequences, of David's resistance to this destiny. The resistance is, at this stage, unconscious, and manifests itself in a series of Freudian slips. David has forgotten who Peabody is ("Peabody? What Peabody?"), and also has to be reminded of Mrs. Carlton-Random and the prospective endowment. In the next sequence, on the golf course, he has again forgotten that Peabody is only Mrs. Carlton-Random's lawyer, and does not actually have the money in his gift. When he arrives at the night-club, David is unable to make up his mind whether to keep or to check his top-hat, an item of the formal uniform he has put on to impress Peabody: a few moments later, his second meeting with Susan is marked by his slipping up and squashing the hat ("You throw an olive and I sit on my hat—it's all perfectly logical").

Thereafter, the meaning of these 'errors' is clarified: they cease merely to express an antagonism to what David thinks he wants, and become explicitly the means of fulfilling a wish for what he thinks he *doesn't* want. After Susan has torn his coat, David tells her that he is going to count to ten with his eyes closed, and wants her to have disappeared when he opens them. She promptly walks away, and it is revealed that David has been standing on the hem of her dress, so causing the 'accident' that forces them together again. Two sequences later, David watches appalled as Susan tries to wake Peabody by hurling pebbles at his bedroom window, and, having virtually confessed his complicity ("I think we ought to go now, but somehow I can't move"), sees her fell the man on whom his future depends with an enormous rock.

One aspect of David's slips is especially important, given the film's thematic, and that is the forgetting or confusion of names and identities—and more generally, the breakdown of rational discourse: much of the comedy of *Bringing Up Baby* is



a matter of the disintegration, simultaneously, of the apparently stable male ego and its language. As David leaves the museum for the golf-course, he is already saying "Goodbye Alice—I mean, professor": even at this stage, his slips are being connected with the mistaking of gender. Subsequently, Hawks uses this motif to link David and the film's other representative patriarchal figures—the agent of law, Constable Slocum/Walter Catlett; the adventurer, Major Applegate/Charles Ruggles; and the psychiatrist, Dr. Lehmann/Fritz Feld. Susan tells her aunt that David's name is Mr. Bone, without forewarning David himself. Aunt Elizabeth proceeds, in all innocence, to introduce David to Major Applegate as Mr. Bone, and David, attributing the unfamiliar name to the Major, says "Hello, Mr. Bone" at the same moment that the Major does; the scene ends with the Major calling out, "Goodbye, Major Applegate," as David leaves. Throughout the gaol sequence, Constable Slocum persists in believing that the characters cannot be who they say they are and adheres tenaciously to Susan's fantastic misrepresentation of them. Having explained to Susan that psychiatrists do not believe that everyone who behaves strangely should be described as "crazy," Dr. Lehmann, the film's professional adjudicator of the rational, produces a massive, unconscious facial convulsion. In each case, the patriarch's assurance of competence and self-possession is shown to be illusory: the harmonious male ego is jangled by the slightest vibration.

The themes of language and repression are again interconnected during the amazingly dense expository sequence in the museum. When finally reminded of who Peabody is, David becomes wildly vivacious and enthusiastic, and tells Alice that "I'll knock him for a loop," only to receive the stern admonition: "No slang, David! Remember who and what you are!" It is clearly important, given Susan's masquerade as Swinging-Door Susie in the gaol sequence, that David's failure to remember who and what he is should express itself here in the use of slang.

Thus Susan's sudden appearance on the golf-course isn't arbitrary. She is both, as David's future lover, a character in her own right, and the embodiment of repressed impulses in David himself—impulses which he fears but to which he's sufficiently drawn to conjure them up so as to prevent his induction into patriarchy. Susan's value is defined through a series of reversals of the values of David's world. Consider, for example, Susan's language, which impedes rational discourse as strikingly as David's errors, but in an entirely different way. Both constitute a return of the repressed, but whereas in David's case the repressed appears merely as an interruption of language, in Susan's it has itself been organised as a language. One incident must suffice for demonstration. Susan tricks David into coming to her apartment by pretending that she is being mauled by her leopard (which, at this stage, David has never seen). Arriving breathless to find Susan in perfect health, David refuses to believe that the leopard exists, but when he discovers it in the bathroom he panics at once, and cries desperately to Susan that "you've got to get out of this apartment." Unperturbed but bewildered, Susan replies, "But David, I have a lease."

In terms of rational discourse, Susan's reply is nonsense; but "there is sense behind joking nonsense such as this, and it is this sense that makes the nonsense into a joke" (Freud 1978, p. 94). The joke consists in the cryptic dramatisation of two attitudes to the repressed: David's injunction makes no sense to Susan because she cannot conceive of the leopard's being an object of fear, though from David's point of view the fear is rational, and the comedy is produced by the collision between the two orders of logic. The source of Susan's power in the film

is that while David's slips disturb his speech incoherently, Susan disturbs it coherently: her logic is the articulate expression of the forces internal to David's which he seeks, nevertheless, to disown. Elsewhere, of course, Susan's language is characterised by the kind of verbal play which Freud sees as being essential to the pleasure of jokes, and which Susan indulges most freely as Swinging-Door Susie. The different use of language has its corollary in a different model of identity. David's rational discourse and rational ego, depending on repression, are constantly vulnerable to disturbance, but Susan is both stable and Protean. Her constant metamorphoses embody a real consistency which instantly exposes the factitious wholeness of patriarchal order.

Susan is the antagonist not only of the linguistic order of the bourgeois world, but also of its organisation of property. On her first appearance she walks off with David's golf-ball, and responds to his attempt to establish the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine' by remarking that she's "not too particular about things like that." She proceeds at once to take his car, and fails completely to understand a lengthy conversation in which David tries to tell her that the car is his. Later in the film she appropriates another car, in the course of evading a conviction for having parked in front of a fire hydrant, and agrees to return it not because of moral qualms but because "I don't like it anyway." The significance of Susan's lack of concern for private property is crystallised in her exasperated question to David in the parking lot: "Your ball? Your car? Does everything in the world belong to you?" Capitalist property is organised by men; and the second car that Susan takes belongs not just to anyone but to Dr. Lehmann, from whose table, in the nightclub sequence, Susan has already removed a bowl of olives before creating the confusion in which David is accused of stealing Mrs. Lehmann's purse. The fact that the main violation of property rights in the film—the appropriation of David's bone—is performed by George, the third (with Susan and Baby), of the agents of the return of the repressed, makes the significance fully explicit. The undermining of property is also the undermining of phallic power, and the phallus ("It's rare! It's precious!") the quintessential commodity. To describe Susan as a thief would be inaccurate, in that it would imply that she knows what private property is. It is the case, rather, that she thinks of things in terms of their use-value only, and is unable to conceive of their belonging to anybody: having come to the golf-course in a car, she will naturally leave in one. When, in the gaol sequence, Susan pretends to be a notorious thief, she is not identifying with crimes against property (which can't have a meaning if property doesn't) but improvising a solution to the problem of the moment—the virtue of crime, from Susan's point of view, is that it will capture the imagination of Constable Slocum. Her own imagination is fired by the idea of playing with the linguistic idiom of the *film* gangster (David tries in vain to convince the Constable that Susan is "making it all up out of movies that she's seen"), and Hawks extends the play, through an in-joke about Grant's previous role as 'Jerry the Nipper' in *The Awful Truth*, to the conventions of his own film.

The appropriation of the phallus—it might be thought that what Susan does to David can be summed up as 'castration.' It is, in fact, the distinction of *Bringing Up Baby* to have dissociated the theme of a man's discovery of his 'femininity' from the idea of loss—loss of dignity, loss of status, loss, ultimately, of the balls. What Hawks emphasises is the gain: the losses are themselves felt to be positive. Indeed, it is the *acquisition* of the phallus which is associated with deprivation: *Bringing Up Baby* would be a completely different film if it were not so emphatically established that Susan enables the resurgence of a 'femin-



ity' which David already possesses and which, despite himself, he is unwilling to renounce. This premise makes of an action which might be rendered as 'castration' an experience of release and pleasure, and the moment when David is at last prepared to admit that it *was* pleasure is the moment that the dinosaur collapses. Having hunted for the bone with desperate fervour, David refuses it when Susan brings it to him, and his refusal is the admission that the hunt had less to do than he thought it did with its ostensible object. For him, as for George and Susan, it was play, and in noting this we make a fundamental point about the Grant persona. If 'castration' in *Bringing Up Baby* becomes something else, it is because Grant's acting conveys the enjoyment of incidents which are theoretically demeaning.

The extraordinary nature of the kind of hero embodied by Grant in his comedies of the late '30s has hardly been recognised, but in what other male star, classical or modern, is the realisation of a man's 'femininity' endorsed so specifically and explicitly? And what other male star is both romantic hero and *farceur*? There is clearly a relationship between the two propositions. Consider the moment in *Bringing Up Baby* when David, harassed, beleaguered and attired in ill-fitting hunting pink (Susan having stolen his clothes), tries to get Susan to grasp how vital it is that her aunt should not find out that David is in fact the eminent Professor Huxley. Susan listens dutifully, with an expression of entranced abstraction, but when David has finished she betrays her real preoccupation by telling him that "you look so handsome without your glasses." David's comic indignity, which has been, by this time, very clearly equated with feminisation (his previous costume was Susan's negligée), doesn't make him the less attractive; and the fact that it doesn't has a corresponding effect on the idea of 'indignity'—David's glasses are part of the constraining uniform of Professor Huxley. Characteristically, we are asked to find Grant romantically attractive because, rather than in spite of, his being made to look 'ridiculous,' and it is significant that in order to transform Grant, in *Notorious*, into the most detestable leading man in the American popular cinema, Hitchcock has entirely to subdue the comedian. The point made by Hitchcock's casting, here and in *Suspicion*, is that being the romantic lover—self-consciously tall, dark and handsome—is in itself to be in power: the situation in these films, and in the 'persecuted wife' melodrama generally (think of the practice of casting famous lover-figures—Charles Boyer in *Gaslight*, Robert Taylor in *Undercurrent*—as the oppressive husband), is the reverse of that in *film noir*. It is because the heroines of *Suspicion* and *Notorious* desire the Grant character that they become vulnerable to him.

To say no more than that Grant's being, generally, both romantic and comic removes the sexual threat won't quite do: though that is importantly part of it, the formula is too negative in suggestion. What we have in *The Awful Truth*, *Holiday* and *Bringing Up Baby* is something like an image of a positive bisexuality—something with which we are familiar in the personae of many of the great female stars, but which it is difficult to parallel amongst the men. All three films are concerned with the elimination of the differential of social/sexual power within the heterosexual couple, and use Grant to formulate a type of masculinity which is valuable and attractive by virtue of the sharing of gender characteristics with women. The particular beauty of Grant's collaboration with Katharine Hepburn consists (questions of acting apart) in the complementary bisexuality of the Hepburn persona: I have made the case for the radical bearing of the partnership elsewhere (Britton, *op. cit.*).

Given the thematic content of the early Grant persona it is,

perhaps, hardly surprising, that Cary Grant the person sometimes became the object of anti-gay animus and innuendo. Kenneth Anger's book *Hollywood Babylon* reprints a '30s cartoon of Grant which bills him as the star of a film called "Who's a Fairy?" (Anger 1975, p. 177). In her biography of Grant, Lee Guthrie suggests that studio executives were at one time so worried about Grant's image, particularly after he began to share a house with Randolph Scott, that they set out expressly to manufacture publicity which would build up Grant's 'virility,' and quotes from a contemporary interview with Scott which appeared beneath the caption, "Randy says the guy's regular" (Guthrie 1977, pp. 104-5). For all their gratuitousness, such things have a marginal critical interest as evidence of a felt discrepancy between the Grant persona and the dominant social norms of 'masculinity.'

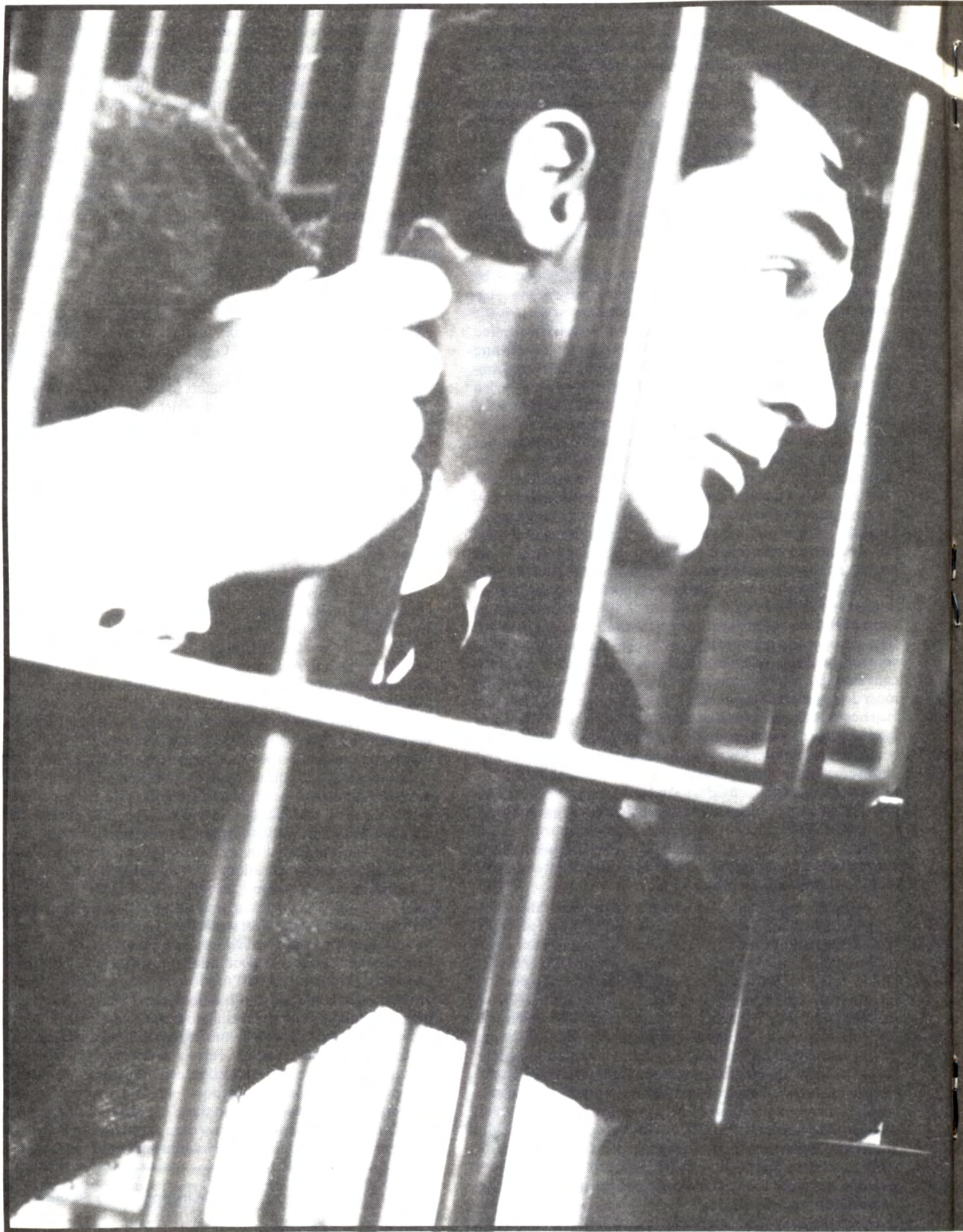
THE SCREWBALL COMEDIES, AND IN PARTICULAR *The Awful Truth*, invite comparison with the romantic comedies of Grant's maturity—*An Affair to Remember* (McCarey, 1957), *Indiscreet*, *Houseboat* and *North by Northwest*. The Grant characters in these later works have obvious points in common. Each is defined, at the outset, in terms of spiritual emptiness and aimlessness. Nickie's grandmother/Cathleen Nesbitt tells Terry/Deborah Kerr in *An Affair to Remember* that Nickie has abandoned his painting because "he has been too busy—'living,' as they call it," and adds that "everything came too easily to him." In *Houseboat*, Tom tells Cinzia that he is "one of the undomesticated animals," and that while adults admire him for being "suave and debonair," children "look right through me as if there was nothing there. Maybe there isn't." In *North by Northwest*, Thornhill tells Eve/Eva Marie Saint that the middle initial of his monogram (R.O.T.) stands for "nothing." In each case, the emotional shallowness is associated with the Grant character's being sexually 'unattached.' Nickie is a playboy; Philip Adams in *Indiscreet* lies to Anna so as to avoid marrying her; Tom is a widower whose dedication to his profession has alienated him from his children; and when Thornhill, in response to Eve's charge that he "doesn't believe in marriage," tells her that he's been married twice, she replies, "See what I mean?" Shallowness is answered and corrected, in each case, by falling in love.

The schema is, of course, reductive: the limits of the present purpose should not be allowed to suggest that masterpieces (which I take the McCarey and the Hitchcock to be) can be exhausted in a formula. *An Affair to Remember* is one of the cinema's most poignant inquiries of romanticism and the conditions of its realisation. Terry's remark to Nickie's grandmother as the couple leaves her house ("It's a perfect world. Thank you for letting me trespass") establishes McCarey's theme. The "perfect world" is a walled flower-garden, and the film is preoccupied with the way in which the impulse to return to it creates the conditions in which it is lost. It is while she is "looking up" to "the nearest thing to heaven" that Terry has her accident, and her obsession (we may compare her to Ophelia's Lisa) with refusing to contact Nickie until she is actually well enough to go to him in person almost succeeds in destroying the relationship. Terry's redemption of Nickie, then, has its irony, and the play between the demeaning idealisation of women characteristic of Nickie's bachelorhood ("Every woman I meet I put up there") and Terry's romantic idealism has a greater complexity than might at first appear.<sup>2</sup>

*North by Northwest* is virtually unique in Hitchcock's work

OVER—*Bringing Up Baby*: 'Swinging Door Susie'.











in that here male sexuality does not remain, at the end, unregenerate: it might be compared in this respect with *Notorious*, in which Devlin's 'change of heart' is ironically undercut. Roger Thornhill, exemplary capitalist male, successful, urbane and cynically confident of his secure possession of himself and his world, finds himself, 'by chance,' the pawn of the ruling class of that world. For the Professor/Leo G. Carroll, the film's supreme patriarch, and the guardian of democratic law, Thornhill's fate is a matter of pure contingency, and in being reduced to a mere agent for the preservation of the structure of power which the Professor represents, Thornhill is placed in a position like Eve's: each is being used to "get Vandamm," the patriarchal challenger. On Vandamm/James Mason's first appearance, he and Thornhill are paralleled to each other, Hitchcock's inter-cut panning shots as the two men circle each other establishing the one as the other's mirror image (and the casting of James Mason, whose persona shares with Grant's a suave urbanity which has often been identified with calculating sexual oppressiveness, is clearly relevant here).<sup>3</sup> The Professor, Thornhill and Vandamm have in common the exploitation of Eve: the Professor uses her to seduce Vandamm, who uses her in turn to seduce Thornhill, and Thornhill, as the dialogue I began by quoting indicates ("I'm beginning to think I'm underpaid") sees her as an occasion for the demonstration of his sexual charisma. The action can be defined in terms of Thornhill's gradual identification with and commitment to Eve, through an experience of powerlessness—of the woman's function in patriarchy—and an accompanying disengagement from the Professor and Vandamm, who, though political antagonists, are equally patriarchs. *North by Northwest* ends, famously, with one of Hitchcock's most brilliant images of patriarchal power, the presidential monoliths of Mount Rushmore, which impede the couple's escape; and we note that while the statues embody, of course, a bombastic myth of the bourgeois-democratic state, it is Vandamm's house which is concealed behind them. The final images—the cut from Thornhill lifting Eve to safety on the mountain to his lifting her into his berth on the train—are deeply ambiguous in suggestion, and the content of the ambiguity is enacted in the last shot of the train's disappearance into a tunnel. The phallic symbol ("But don't tell anyone") completes the partial reinstatement of male authority—Eve has been passive to Thornhill's rescue, and to his renaming of her ("Come on, Mrs. Thornhill")—but it is also clear that the concluding image dramatises a withdrawal from the world of patriarchal struggle in which the action has been set. The dissonance isn't resolved, but I think we feel it to be different in kind from the bleak, ironic dissonance on which *Notorious* ends: Devlin hasn't been separated from Sebastian as Thornhill has from Vandamm and the Professor (who end up side by side on another peak of the mountain), and it is, indeed, of the essence of Devlin's 'conversion' that it allows him, in taking over Sebastian's role, to assume power over Sebastian and Alicia at the same time.

*Indiscreet* and *Houseboat*, for all their charm, are very much simpler propositions. The Grant character's attractiveness and desirability consist in his being "one of the undomesticated animals," and the films seek to reconcile the contradiction between the allure characteristic of the sexual wanderer and domesticity. Grant hardly ever plays action heroes (he has never made, and is unimaginable in, a Western), and when he does we are primarily aware of how unlike an action hero he is. The unlikeness is brilliantly exploited by Hawks in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), in which Jeff's toughness, the insistently signalled 'masculinity' of the leader of men, is analysed as the camouflage of vulnerability, and it is signifi-

cant, given the persona established by the screwball comedies, that the homoerotic component of Hawksian male friendship is more clearly focused in the relationship between Jeff and Kid/Thomas Mitchell than in the equivalent relationships in *To Have and Have Not* and *Rio Bravo*. Yet as my description will have implied, the use to which Grant is put in *Houseboat*, and elsewhere, can be discussed in terms of the opposition between settling and wandering so fundamental to the action hero.

The inflection, however, is unique. Wandering, as Grant embodies it, is urban (Ernie Mott in *None But the Lonely Heart* described himself as "a citizen of the Great Smoke—and I don't stay put!") and, whether Cockney or sophisticated, is associated not with male achievement in the adventurer's sense, but with the pursuit of 'idle pleasure'—a hedonistic commitment to ease and comfort which may survive on chicanery (*Sylvia Scarlett*, *Mr. Lucky*), and which is almost always at one with the bachelor's desire to 'play the field.' Ernie Mott calls his rags "the uniform of my independence," and Roger Thornhill might have said the same of his executive's suit. Even as a wanderer, Grant does not inhabit the world of male action, and we cannot conceive of the adventurer's wandering, whatever else it may come to mean (in, for example, James Stewart's work for Mann and Hitchcock), being equated with emotional shallowness. The project of *Houseboat* is to extricate from the shallow "the suave and the debonair," growth of the same soil, and transplant them into the home.

The strength of *Houseboat* and *Indiscreet* is clearly the comic education of male presumption, the comedy issuing in recognition and change, but it could hardly be maintained that the couples formed at the end of these films have anything like the radical suggestiveness of those produced by the screwball comedies. The difference consists in quite distinct conceptions of what 'falling in love' means; or rather, in the absence, in the screwball comedies, of anything approximating to what 'falling in love' conventionally denotes. The phrase hardly covers the experience of David and Susan in *Bringing Up Baby*, despite Susan's plangent cry, as she realises that she is going to have to steal David's clothes again to prevent his getting away, that he is "the only man I've ever loved." As for the Warriners, long-married and in the throes of divorce, the romantic belongs to the past: even when they return, at the end of *The Awful Truth*, to the mountain chalet they knew in happier days, it is not for the re-enactment of a nostalgic yesterday, but for the last act in the comedy of the reorganisation of gender roles—comedy organised by one of the cinema's most delightful erotic metaphors (the large black cat which valiantly holds shut the door of Lucy's bedroom with its paw, frustrating Jerry's attempts at entry until Lucy herself permits it). Linda and Johnny, in *Holiday*, do 'fall in love' in something more like the familiar sense, and their doing so produces two of the film's most beautiful moments—the solitary waltz to the tune of the musical box on New Year's Eve, and Linda's confession of her love to Ned. Yet here again, the film's very premise—Johnny has already fallen in love with, and become engaged to, Julia/Doris Nolan with exemplary romantic dispatch—makes something different of the Johnny/Linda relationship, which grows out of a mutual allegiance to the complex oppositional values embodied in 'play.'

It may be said that the screwball couples don't fall in love because they learn to 'have fun' instead, and that the beginning of 'fun' is the end of 'romance.' To put the same thing in a different way, they don't fall in love because they dispense with the phallus, and with it the phallic organisation of desire—the organisation which may be sublimated as 'love,' and which



entails an opposition between being in love and being "one of the undomesticated animals." In *Houseboat*, the hero's education is tied in with the theme of the domestication of the wanderer, the containment of male sexuality within the couple and the home. In *Bringing Up Baby* David becomes "undomesticated," but not in any sense that can be easily grasped by the settling/wandering antinomy. Male sexuality is not 'contained' but transformed; the screwball comedies are thinking towards a concept of sexual relations in which sexual energy is not of the kind which is either contained (in the interests of social reproduction) or dissipated. The films produce, in fact, a utopian resolution of the romantic and the polymorphous—a stable, monogamous couple in which bourgeois gender identities, and their normative social function, no longer obtain.

The resolution is a difficult one, and the difficulty appears strikingly in the fact that Grant can be cast not only in films which seek to reconcile the charm of the bachelor and man-about-town with domesticity, but also in comedies of the male's domestic repression. Compare *Houseboat* and *Room for One More* (Taurog, 1951), the subject of which is the impossibility, for 'Poppy' Rose (the theme of the father's emasculation is sufficiently blatant), of having sex with his wife because of her obsessive impulse to adopt into the Rose home, swelling the ranks of the couple's own children, a succession of deserving orphans. It is characteristic of the Grant persona that the experience of domestic constraint should be as little a matter of the yearning for adventure as wandering was the pursuit of it: there is no hint in *Room for One More* of George Bailey/James Stewart's desire, in *It's a Wonderful Life*, to "lassoo the moon." Consider the sequence in which 'Poppy' undertakes to give Jimmy-John/Clifford Tatum, Jr. a sex education lesson, illustrating his lecture by drawing the outline of a male and female figure in the sand with a stick. Anna/Betsy Drake, his wife, remarks on how badly the female figure is sketched, and 'Poppy' replies cryptically that he has had to "draw from memory." In its commitment to the inestimable value, for the orphans, of a 'good home,' the film is also committed to the value of the hero's celibacy, and his patient, self-abnegating fulfilment of a father's responsibilities is rewarded in the final shot, but the comedy depends throughout (as it does, though with a very different emphasis, in *Houseboat*) on the contradiction between the Grant persona and domesticity. A similar theme is implicit in *Mr. Blandings Builds his Dream House* (Potter, 1948), in which the hero's dissatisfaction with settlement expresses itself, ironically, in the compulsiveness with which he pursues his ambition of constructing the perfect family home. That, at least, is potentially the theme. The film in fact submerges it, and is left hesitating between the opinion that the 'dream house' represents a valid democratic aspiration; that it is 'irresponsible,' because Blandings' obsession with it threatens to disrupt the family; and that Blandings is neurotic (see, for instance, his paranoid jealousy of Bill Cole/Melvyn Douglas).

The themes from which *Mr. Blandings* withdraws are fully dramatised in Grant's last film for Howard Hawks, *Monkey Business* (1952), whose radical dissimilarity to *Bringing Up Baby*, magnified by the superficial resemblances, is eloquent of the completeness with which the synthesis of screwball comedy has disintegrated. There is nothing here of the reconciliation of alienated sexual energy and 'refinement.' The return of the repressed in *Monkey Business* is much closer to that characteristic of the Gothic: there is, that is to say, no equivalent for Susan. The energies liberated by B-4 are no longer capable of transforming the ego which denies them, but are instead refracted through it: they have the character at once of

being 'primal' and of having been generated by 'necessary' social constraints that we associate with the horror film, and with its difficult *impasse*. The completeness of Hawks' hostility to bourgeois society keeps *Monkey Business* a comedy, but it is clearly significant that it is the last of his comedies (if we set aside the attempt to remake *Bringing Up Baby* as *Man's Favourite Sport?*). The ability, in the period which produced Sirk's melodramas, to conceive of any creative energies surviving the middle classes is already strained to the limit. Consider the extent of the distance between the discomfiture the Warliners inflict on each other in *The Awful Truth*, or the kind of play involved in the hunt for the bone in *Bringing Up Baby*, with the sequence in *Monkey Business* in which Barnaby/Grant and Edwina/Ginger Rogers bedaub each other with paint, or that astonishing climactic scene where Barbary and the children, dressed as Indians, prepare to scalp Hank Entwistle/Hugh Marlowe. Oppositional 'play' has become retributive violence, and 'having fun' has taken on a Hobbesian complexion. *Monkey Business* is an extraordinary work, but by 1952 the exhilaration of release in screwball comedy has lost, irretrievably, its utopian dimension.

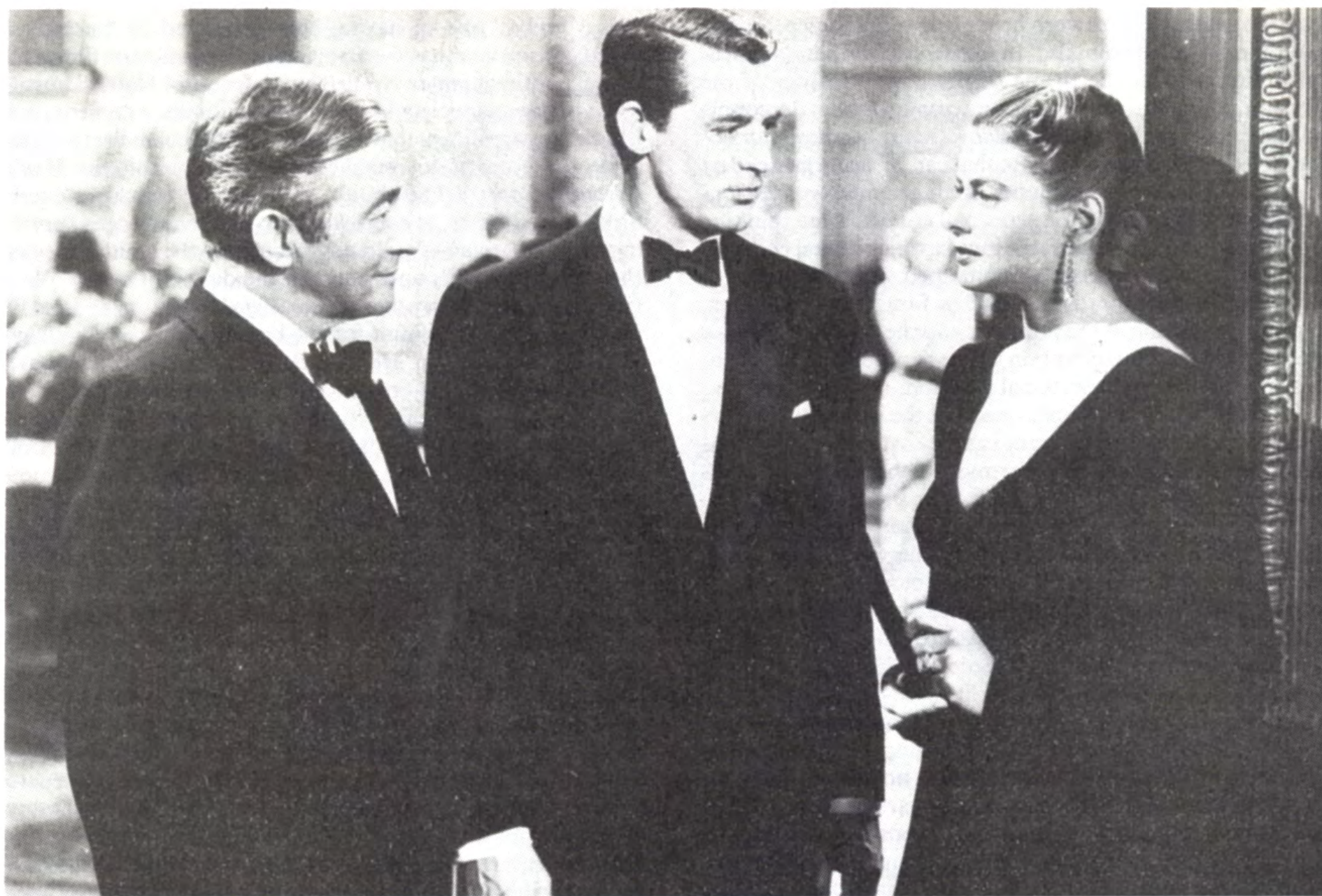
**I**s pleasure democratic?

The word I first proposed for Grant was 'irresponsibility,' but it will have been apparent that the transition is an easy one. 'Pleasure,' in fact, in bourgeois language is a profoundly dubious quantity. Bourgeois rhetoric promises 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,' but it turns out, when we read the representative documents, that 'liberty' is the liberty of the free market, and that these felicities are for the industrious. Pleasure involves a venal moral relaxation, and a willingness, where the necessities of life are concerned, to have something for nothing. Moral relaxation expresses itself in, and conduces to, social parasitism, and pleasure is an addiction of all classes except the bourgeoisie.

The interplay between ideas of pleasure and irresponsibility in the Grant persona explain its peculiar class character. Grant can play, on the one hand, the working-class man as feckless Cockney, indigent, carefree and work-shy: Ernie Mott in *None But the Lonely Heart* (Odets, 1944) is representative ("You know me, ducky—tramp of the universe!"). He can also play the idle rich, executives and professionals of that level of attainment at which the notion of labour tends to acquire a theoretic air and we are primarily conscious of its rewards. The Grant persona is profoundly incompatible with industry, and this, of course, an essential aspect of its attractiveness. Yet it also raises ideology problems, which appear in the fact that each class type can merge into the confidence trickster. Thus we have Jimmy Monkley in *Sylvia Scarlett*, the proletarian adventurer as charlatan and glib opportunist, or, in *Mr. Lucky*, Joe Adams, illegal gambler and draft-dodger (and, though American underworld, still Cockney). Conversely, Johnny Aysgarth in *Suspicion* is an upper-class English playboy, who until the arbitrary happy ending, is living off and conspiring to murder his wife, and the Grant characters in *Indiscreet*, *Houseboat* and *North by Northwest* all share a duplicity which is clearly correlated with class privilege.

The kind of issues raised by the conflict between a commitment to pleasure and a democratic life of moral probity and honest toil emerges very clearly in *Holiday*, which seeks to solve the problem by introducing a distinction, classically left-populist, between the spirit of 'democracy' and its actual operations. Johnny embodies the ideals of the first insurgent bourgeoisie (the holiday is his "Declaration of Independence") and Mr. Seton a contemporary capitalism which is felt to have lost touch with those ideals through an obsession with







accumulation: for Mr. Seton, Johnny's lack of interest in making money is "un-American." This hiving off of democratic principle from capitalist reality, as a thing distinct and superior in kind, allows *Holiday* to reclaim energies which express themselves in an aversion to profitable labour, and it does so in such a way as to restate the problem: as I noted earlier, the film is compelled to conclude that the American spirit cannot survive in America.

The representation of Grant as a viable democratic figure, then, depends upon the holding together of a standard of bourgeois-democratic responsibility and qualities which, by that same standard, can be construed as *irresponsible*. *Holiday* succeeds, insofar as it does, by arguing that bourgeois rhetoric, embodied by the aspirations of the Founding Fathers, and bourgeois practice have no connection with each other, and *People Will Talk* (Mankiewicz, 1951) enacts a variant of the same strategy: the moral values and allegiances of Dr. Praetorius, while they incite the wrath of the hide-bound petit-bourgeois community, express a real, normative democratic feeling.

The case appears at its most fascinating, as we might expect, in Grant's appearances in the 'commitment' film—that trans-generic cycle of the '40s in which the action turns on the winning for the democratic cause of a previously uncommitted, and thus irresponsible, figure. It is of the essence of the Grant persona that he can be cast both as the spokesman of democracy—*The Talk of the Town* (Stevens, 1942), *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (McCarey, 1942)—and as the commitment figure—*Mr. Lucky*, *None But the Lonely Heart*: Grant's penultimate film, *Father Goose* (Nelson, 1964), is still able to exploit this motif.

The peculiar success of *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (to which Robin Wood [Wood, 1976] has devoted a splendid article) lies in its closeness to the screwball tradition—a tradition which is still, at this point, artistically viable, and from which the film derives a normative concept of the democratic couple in which the idea of 'irresponsible' pleasure has great positive value. It is against this norm that the kind of irresponsibility represented by Katharine Butte-Smith/Ginger Rogers is measured. She aspires, essentially, to the world of the Vances and the Setons, which means, here, not the American haut bourgeoisie but European fascism (though the possibility of the link was always there: see, for example, Capra, or the emphasis in *Holiday* on the fact that the Seton Crams/Henry Daniell and Binnie Barnes are sympathetic to Hitler). The persistence of this tradition allows the director of *The Awful Truth* to associate, in *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, Katie's progress towards commitment with the recovery of sexuality and pleasure: the couple can be politically responsible while continuing to occupy the outskirts of the realm of play. What is lost in the fusion is the sexual progressiveness of screwball comedy. The propaganda theme necessitates a conservative dramatisation of gender—the couple must be, however 'heightened,' the *normal* American couple, associated in the film's imagery with reproduction, and 'play' in *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (Grant's tape-measure and saxophone) is phallic.

Yet the inner tensions of the Grant persona create an occasion for the most fascinating inflections of the 'commitment' thematic. The persistent gender ambiguity of the persona

manifests itself, in *The Talk of the Town*, in the way in which the Rogers part from *Honeymoon* comes to be played by a man. Nora Shelley/Jean Arthur, while being obviously necessary for appearance's sake, is no less conspicuously irrelevant to the relationship between Leopold Dilg/Grant and Michael Lightcap/Ronald Colman, and her redundancy is nowhere more apparent than in the penultimate scene in which Lightcap renounces her to his 'rival'—at the very point at which, were Lightcap a woman, he would be united with Dilg himself. Indeed, the terms in which Lightcap describes Dilg, and Dilg's love, to Nora, suggest unmistakably his own declaration of love, and the stolidity of *The Talk of the Town* is very much a matter, not merely of George Stevens, but of the necessary impossibility of realising the film's latent content.

In *Notorious*, Hitchcock continues to use Grant as the spokesman for democracy, but deprives it of all positive significance by dissolving the absolute distinction between democracy and fascism on which the commitment film depends. This inflection, or more precisely, negation of the genre is, of course, characteristic. Three years before *Notorious*, in *Lifeboat*, Hitchcock had argued that fascism rises to power with the connivance, and on the basis of the deadlocked class antagonisms, of bourgeois democracy, and as we have seen, the relationship between Devlin and Sebastian is taken up again, though with crucial new developments, in *North by Northwest*. The dominant popular reading of the Grant persona—"consummately romantic and consummately genteel"—is essential to Hitchcock's purpose in *Notorious*, and it is powerfully evoked in the sequence built round Alicia's party and the ensuing intoxicated car-ride. The revelation that Devlin is an American agent and the first manifestation of brutality to Alicia (here, physical brutality—Devlin knocks her out) come together, though Hitchcock's imagery has already prepared us for it: from his first appearance, Devlin has been associated with the predatory oppressiveness of the male look at women which the film's opening shot has established as a crucial motif. It is a motif which links Devlin with Sebastian, and it is developed with astonishing power and complexity in the film's great central sequence at Sebastian's reception—the sequence that ends with Devlin's staging, for Sebastian's gaze, of the embrace which leads to the discovery that Alicia has been working for the Americans, and the attempt to murder her. The suave fascist male acts through the sexual impulses of the suave democratic male—it having always been clear that both Devlin and Sebastian see Alicia primarily as a means of consolidating their sense of their own potency. *Notorious* takes up the connection between the heroine's democratisation and male tutelage from *Once Upon a Honeymoon*, but inverts its meaning.

In *Mr. Lucky*, we have *Once Upon a Honeymoon* in reverse, with Grant in the Rogers part. Katie O'Hara, the Brooklyn burlesque queen, becomes Joe Adams, the Cockney/Brooklyn con-man, and the film sets out to infuse the 'democratic' with the trickster's acumen and ebullience while submitting its anti-social character to democratic correction. The mix produced a clear class character. In *The Talk of the Town*, where Grant plays the representative of democracy, Dilg's plebian origins carry no suggestion of the shady or the shiftless (though the film demonstrates its awareness that such a connotation is latent in Grant's working-class characters by making of Dilg an obstreperous worker who has been *falsely* accused of burning down a factory). In *Mr. Lucky*, where Grant plays the commitment figure, the link between the plebian and dishonesty is fully realised, and must be dissolved in the course of the action. At the same time, Joe Adams, though the commitment figure, is also a man, and 'education' is reciprocal in *Mr. Lucky* in a way that it isn't in *Once Upon a*

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OPPOSITE—Grant and Hitchcock: *Notorious* with Claude Rains, Cary Grant, Ingrid Bergman (above). Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint in *North By Northwest* (below).



*Honeymoon*: Dorothy Bryant/Laraine Day must be democratised too, not in the sense of learning commitment, but in that of surrendering, through her experience of Joe, the complacency of a daughter of the upper middle-classes.<sup>4</sup>

It is clearly crucial, in the light of the persona developed by the screwball comedies, in which the tone and content of the comedy of education is so very different, that the anarchic energy associated so strikingly in the earlier films with femininity should appear increasingly as 'boyishness.' The hero's phallic status is partially restored, and Grant's sexual charisma becomes that of the lover who is also a scapegrace son. It is often brought against the screwball comedy, from a 'left' position which it is certainly proper to call 'vulgar,' that the genre is a celebration of wealth and of the wealthy. Nothing could be further from the truth: the hostility to wealth and the social/class privilege endowed by its accumulation could hardly be clearer than it is in *The Awful Truth* and *Holiday*. The wealth of the screwball couple, like its childlessness, is a means of detaching the partners from any social function: it is a precondition for the destruction of the gender roles which are defined by their social function. Wealth in its capitalist meaning becomes valueless. Its purpose is to eliminate the "realm of necessity" and permit the leap into the "realm of freedom"—or at the least, of "post-scarcity anarchism"—whose values, as I've indicated, are categorically non-bourgeois. In the nature of things, such a project is impossible in the commitment film, though the passage into the realm of bourgeois democracy may drive from it something of its élan.

In a sense many of Grant's films are commitment films—comedies of the commitment of the errant male to marriage and settlement, which celebrate the reconciliation of the pursuit of pleasure with social forms which may not at first appear to conduce to it. Of the later films, *North by Northwest* is, perhaps, the closest to the tendency and suggestion of the masterpieces of the late '30s. It is the value of Cary Grant to have embodied a male heterosexuality which is so different in tone from that of the action hero, and which is arrived at through a different kind of relationship with women—a relationship in which the woman appears so often as the educator of the male, and of his pleasure. But it is in the screwball comedies, where that process takes on so radical a character and is distinguished most drastically from a concept of patriarchal 'domesticity' and 'domestication,' that the value is completely realised. Here, uniquely in the popular cinema, Grant's acting creates the attractiveness of male femininity and of the relationships enabled by it.

If I have failed to take up the question I raised at the beginning—the question of Grant's imputed "limitations" as an actor—that is not only because I take the answer to the question to be obvious, and see little point in addressing a failure to perceive it; the reasons which make the proposition that "Cary Grant is a great actor" the reverse of a commonplace require diagnosis, but not refutation. The more important fact is that the felicities of comic acting are more difficult to describe and discuss than acting usually is, and I have preferred to avoid the laboriousness involved in demonstrating that performance is 'productive of meaning.' How does one describe Grant's reaction, in *Bringing Up Baby*, to the news that his marriage is to have "no domestic entanglements of any kind"?—the slight hesitation, the movement of the head (both brilliantly judged), the shift from incomprehension to startled inference, all of which contribute so much to the comic force of the pay-off line, "I mean 'of any kind,' David." Yet if the screwball comedies are the essence of the persona, they also provide the basis for an evaluation of the performer's skills. Here, surely, are imaginative and technical resources comparable to those of Laurel and Hardy and Keaton. □

## NOTES

1. Farce and wit co-exist in other sophisticated comedies, but it is not, of course, the case that the sophisticated couple always acquires the meaning that it does in *The Awful Truth*, *Bringing Up Baby* and *Holiday*. In *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934) and *My Man Godfrey* (La Cava, 1936), the hero presides over the heroine's democratic education, as does the Grant character in *Once Upon a Honeymoon* (McCarey, 1942). In *Holiday* and its two predecessors, we have a mutually enabling encounter between stars, director and genre, in which the radical possibilities of each are realised.
2. *An Affair to Remember* is a close re-make of McCarey's own *Love Affair* (1939), in which Nickie had been played by Charles Boyer, and there are evident affinities between the Grant characters in *Gaslight* and *Notorious* and the Boyer characters in *Gaslight* (Cukor, 1944), *A Woman's Vengeance* (Korda, 1947) and *The Thirteenth Letter* (Preminger, 1951) or between Grant in *Indiscreet* and Boyer in *Back Street* (Stevenson, 1941). In Boyer, too, the charisma of the romantic lover has often been continuous with the vicious, the corrupt and the cynical; yet the difference between the two personae appears in the fact that while RKO compelled Hitchcock to tack on a happy ending to *Suspicion* to protect Grant's image, no such scruple was allowed to impair the dramatic logic of *Gaslight*, in which Boyer, playing a variant of the same melodramatic type, remains unambiguously the villain.  
In accounting for the difference we may note, to begin with, that if Grant rarely plays action heroes, and Boyer doesn't play them at all, Grant appears even less frequently in woman's pictures (*An Affair to Remember* and *Penny Serenade* [Stevens, 1941] are the major exceptions) and Boyer appears in them all the time. Given the thematic of the woman's film, and the privilege accorded by the genre to the exhaustive intensity of the heroine's passion—an intensity that comes to be synonymous with emotional integrity and disinterestedness—the withholding of intimacy and of full reciprocal engagement which Boyer shares with Grant are inflected in another direction. In, say, *The Garden of Allah* (Boleslawski, 1935) or *All This and Heaven Too* (Litvak, 1940), where the Boyer character's refusal to commit himself to 'love' is associated with a tragic moral dilemma, and the claims of passion are contested not by those of egotistic self-assertion but by those of self-abnegating duty (to religious vocation and family respectively), Boyer is presented sympathetically. In *Back Street* and, supremely, *Conquest/Marie Walewska* (Brown, 1937), Boyer embodies a ruthless male ambition which withdraws from love to achieve power and position in a public world from which the heroine is excluded: in both cases, the heroine is reduced to the ignominious role of 'mistress,' and finds herself in an indeterminate hinterland between public and domestic life, without a secure and recognised position in either. The theme of a woman's exploitation by a love to which her 'destiny' as a woman commits her but which the man, though he has appeared to share it, does not return, is taken to an extreme in *Gaslight*, in which the lover's charisma and allure are, from the outset, weapons in a confidence trick. Significantly, while Grant can still be cast as a desirable romantic male until virtually the end of his career, a number of Boyer's later performances, such as those for Minnelli in *The Cobweb* (1955) and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1961), emphasise the dessication of aging charm, and associate the strained, insinuating facility which are all that remain of it with the character's moral bankruptcy. Here, the feeling that the Boyer character's ambitions are worthless (already clear enough in *Conquest*) is compounded by the evident meretriciousness of the manner which once made him plausible.  
It is crucial here that the suggestion of Boyer's 'Europeanness' is very different from Grant's. As the French lover, Boyer inherits the bad connotations of Europe along with its glamour, and in that he does so he can be used to dramatise with particular cogency the suspicion, implicit in the woman's film, that a woman's destiny can very easily become her oppression. Grant's 'Europeanness,' by contrast, is hardly an issue at all. Even when he plays British characters, the emphasis falls on their class position rather than their national origins, and in American settings we are invited to read him as American. In this, he can be distinguished not only from Boyer but from, say, Ronald Colman, whose romantic attractiveness is inseparable from his being an *English* gentleman, and whose persona has no suggestion either of insincerity or of sexual manipulateness.
3. During the lull in his career in the early '50s, Grant was in fact offered the part of the fading movie star Norman Maine, eventually played by Mason, in Cukor's re-make of *A Star is Born* (1954), but turned it down because he



thought it might harm his image.

4. Compare *Mr. Lucky* with *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) in this respect. The animus against Tracy Lord/Katharine Hepburn in Cukor's film (or Barry's play—it might be argued that Cukor qualifies it) is so intense, and the commitment to transform her into "a first-class human being" so relentless, that we can be asked to write off the moral weakness of Dexter Haven/Cary Grant as a mere by-product of his ex-wife's intransigence. At the same time, Haven's unfitness to be the hero is tacitly acknowledged in the presence of Mike/James Stewart, who undertakes Tracy's democratisation in his stead before returning her to her husband. *The Philadelphia Story* manages to give the Grant persona an entirely negative content (his 'femininity' becomes castration, and his 'irresponsibility' dissoluteness) while also requiring us to see it, in the light of Tracy's aberrations, sympathetically. In this, and as a reactionary comedy of re-marriage, the film also invites comparison with *The Awful Truth* and *His Girl Friday* (the second of which is also disturbed by an uncertainty as to what our attitude to the Grant figure is to be).

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# ' the superstar story '

by Gloria Berlin & Bryan Bruce



ANDY

.....  
"Why do people think artists are special? It's just another job."

Andy Warhol

.....  
**I**N HIS NASTY LITTLE WORLD OF NEW YORK IN the '60s, A. Warhol replayed Hollywood of the 1920s to the 1960s. With silver paper, paint and the "superstar," in a series of 'vehicles,' 'remakes' and 'sequels,' Warhol churned films out of the "Factory." Every aspect of the sleazier side of Hollywood was recreated, and with this careful aping of Tinseltown's worst, Warhol helped destroy Hollywoodland. During these halcyon years of the '60s, Warhol's Factory was renown throughout various art and cultural circles, attracting 'real' stars like Montgomery Clift and Judy Garland. Arriving at the Factory, they would find themselves ignored by star watchers eager for a glimpse of Edie Sedgwick, Gerard Malanga, Brigid Polk, or Viva.

.....  
"In the early days of film, fans used to idolize a **whole** star—they would take one star and love everything about that star . . . Now fans only idolize **parts** of the stars. . ."

Andy Warhol

.....  
It was during this period from '63 to '67 that Warhol's Factory was at its zenith, cranking out his "products"—paintings, movies, stars—consumer items all, mass-produced by Warhol's meagerly paid assistants who silk-screened the paintings, scripted the films or simply made them for him. His assembly line approach to art was at odds with classical and 20th century notions of art and artists, no longer privileged in any traditional sense. Creative people were quickly appropriated to provide Warhol with new products, his empire an accurate mirror of industrial America, providing sensationalistic material for a consumer world constantly seeking diversion from boredom. When Warhol's output extended from painting and the art world to film, his production methods remained the same, and what was foreign to 'art' was actually natural to movies: Hollywood had always operated in this way. It was Warhol's decision that rather than hide the mechanics of production, he would highlight them, revelling in the exaggerated and ironic effect when executed on the small, crude scale his income at the time would allow. Stars, as part of the 'industry,' were given names like Paul America, Viva, Ondine, and Ingrid Superstar, and rendered as representations in this way, their by-products—style, films, books, wit—to be consumed. Ondine was the archetypal gay male symbol, his name taken from Greek mythology; Paul America stood in for American men as the blond, tall, silent, slightly dumb stud; Edie Sedgwick was the unfortunate example of the "girl of the year," the easily replaced icon, in her case by Ingrid Superstar, who Warhol and his cronies devised to substitute for Edie. Each personality was, ideally, succeeded by another newer one. Warhol himself could be replaced, and was on occasion, for lectures and interviews. Each film was forgotten in the wake of a newer one always being made, old films cast off or chopped up in favour of sequels, remakes, new stars, better locations, the old product for the new. His was the blank generation, filling up time with new product.

*Empire* is the film that is always invoked as the definitive representation of Warhol's early 'structuralist' period. Allegedly filmed in 'real' time in accordance with Warhol's aesthetic, it was in fact not even Warhol's original idea, but John Palmer's, one of his early assistants, and not actually 'real' time. Sections were repeated to manufacture the 12 hour epic of a day in the life of the famous building. The audience



was encouraged to leave and return during the screening, or to listen to the radio or become distracted by some other diversion, anything to disrupt the "unity of time and space" that was the avowed intent of the structuralists. Warhol used structuralism as he had used "Pop Art," the current trend of the medium, easy to exploit for his own gain. Extending structuralism to its most extreme and absurd point was a provocative gesture, designed, at once, to get attention, and to parody and ridicule the structuralists, augmented by Warhol's shameless embracing of all publicity, something quite counter to widely held notions of the purity of the artist's position. Theatres were alternately emptied or filled with noisy curiosity seekers, most of whom were not interested in the film itself, which lost its importance to the 'event.' Therein lies the significance of Warhol's gesture: to allow the event, the active audience, and the real-life moment to take precedence over the passive, accepting audience, the film, the art itself.

.....  
 "Naturally, the Factory had fags; we were in the entertainment business and—That's Entertainment!"

Andy Warhol<sup>3</sup>

.....  
 Having captured the attention of the art world with this initial structuralist period, Warhol began in earnest his recreation of Hollywood. Stars were sought for the films—drug addicts, drag queens, models and hustlers rounded up and set on display in flagrant, arrogant disregard of notions of 'public decency.' Warhol presented the same characters—hustlers, homosexuals, deviants—on whose backs Hollywood was built, both on screen and off (closeted gay actors, actresses, and directors, set designers, wardrobe and make-up people, mistresses and gigolos, etc.), characters who in Warhol's films, for the first time, were not seen as tragic or indecent figures, but as individuals whose personal lives could be in many cases identical to Hollywood lives if unmasked and without shame. All that Hollywood alluded to but disguised was now to be displayed. For example, in one early film, *Hedy*, Mario Montez, Warhol's first transvestite 'star,' plays Hedy Lamarr in the real-life drama which had occurred a few years earlier: the star arrested for shoplifting. In the film, Hedy/Montez is arrested and brutalized by a sadistic policewoman, played by Mary Woronov, and in the process the entire notion of the glamorous star is destroyed.

## EDIE AND ANDY

.....  
 "Edie dyed her hair silver to match mine, and the photographers couldn't tell us apart."

Andy Warhol<sup>4</sup>

.....  
**A**T THIS TIME CHUCK WEIN AND RONALD Tavel were scripting the films for Warhol. All three were homosexual—'gay' became a coveted state, along with anything else too 'real' to exist in Hollywood. As their centre-piece, Wein and Tavel brought Edie Sedgwick to the Factory, a classmate from Harvard and colleague in outrages perpetrated against staid university life. Edie Sedgwick had money at her disposal, time on her hands, and, as is customary with the wealthy, the notion of 'style' as an ultimate goal was

not an unseemly way to spend one's life. In Edie's case, style became a radical tool with which to challenge society's norms. She wore leotards rather than pants or skirts, unless wearing the very shortest of mini-skirts; her make-up was theatrical; she flirted with bondage in the form of arm bracelets which attached together across her chest; she cut her hair short to resemble a boy, then dyed it silver to match Andy's. Her attachment to Andy was one more facet of rebellion, and together they made a definitive statement against homogeneous society with its strict designation of masculine and feminine roles. The image of them together was profoundly radical: sexless twins, androgynous and interchangeable.

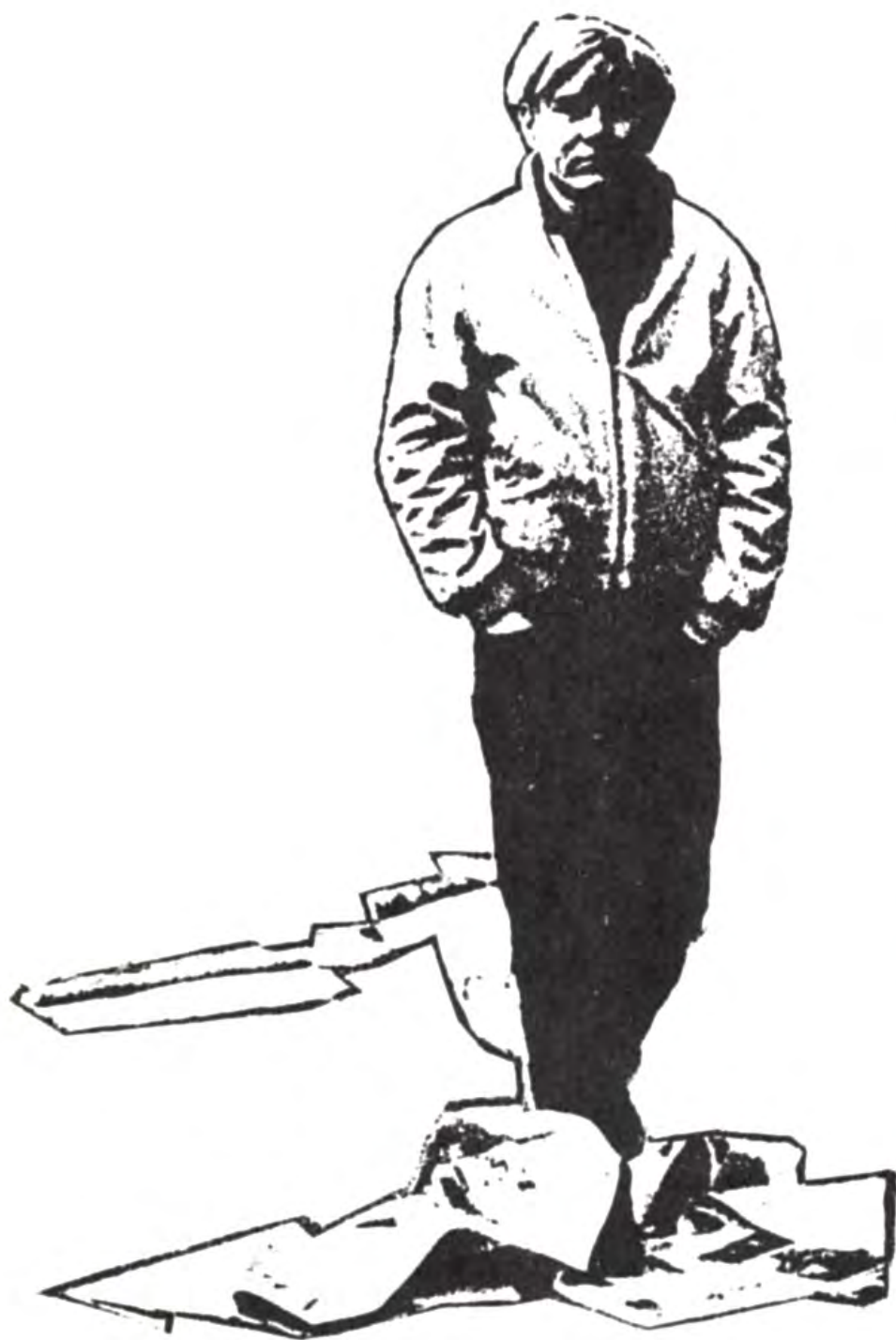
It was obvious why Warhol had quickly replaced his first star, Baby Jane Holzer, *Girl of 1964*, with Edie. Jane's image was conventional: she was married to a wealthy man and slightly repelled by the drugs and homosexuality of the Factory. Although interested in the public life given her by association with Warhol—Tom Wolfe's "Girl of the Year" essay from *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, numerous *Vogue* appearances—Jane was comfortable with the conventions of an image that didn't confront, affront, or shock. Her collaboration with Warhol stemmed from his 'artist' status, and as a collector of art, she was mainly interested in the Pop phenomenon. On becoming a Pop product herself, she appeared to be unaware of what she could radically accomplish with this otherwise dubious distinction. Far more interesting than Jane's star persona was the portrayal of "Baby Jane" on the *Batman* TV series, in which the Joker (standing in for Warhol, as the arch villain), made-up, mincing and grotesque in his unstated homosexuality, uses the Jane stand-in as an unwitting foil for his crimes, posing himself as a modern artist. Within the context of the Pop television show, the extremities of artifice and art are examined, using the framing device of crime. When the artifice and artist *become* the crime, the ideological project of the law and order crusader show is apparent: unless used to support this project, as the set, costumes and props of *Batman* do, suspicion is cast upon these extravagances. If the Joker was believed to mirror Warhol's persona, then the "Baby Jane" persona was the





popular fantasy of the victim of the conniving artist fooling society. The fact that Jane Holzer could be seen in this light was probably what attracted Warhol to Edie instead. Rather than the mutual exploitation of Baby Jane and Andy, the symbiotic relationship of Edie and Andy was preferable, more confrontational, star and director interchangeable, with Edie determining the extent of the radical impact they would have, as collaborators.

So it is with Edie that Warhol creates his 'flip' Hollywood (flip connoting "the reverse" as well as jokey, casual). The Factory was Hollywood's nemesis, its Wonderland looking glass. Within this framework, Warhol projects the images of ultimate freedom, effectively selling every by-product of this freedom as Art. If the public was being fooled, it was no more than by any corporation, by any company, no more than by Hollywood itself. And like Hollywood, with its endless stories of violence and sex, Warhol used sensationalism to sell his product, but with a twist: this is real sex, real violence, these are real people. This hyper-reality is pushed to an even further extreme: Warhol's films pay no lip service to any particular moral, conventional norms in order to pass judgement on or distill the real-life activities of the people at the Factory.



"Meanwhile, we were becoming the target for some very aggressive attacks on drugs and homosexuality. If the attacks were done in a clever, funny way, I enjoyed reading them as much as anybody. But if someone in the press put us down, without humor, on 'moral grounds,' I would think, 'Why are they attacking us? Why aren't they out there attacking, say, Broadway musicals, where there are probably more fags in any one production than there are at the whole Factory? . . . Why us, when you could meet your favorite matinee idols from Hollywood who gave out interviews all the time on what their dream girls were like—and they'd all have their **boyfriends** with them?'"

Andy Warhol<sup>5</sup>

It was at this point, in 1965, as Warhol's project began to succeed and Hollywood's to fail, that the Factory's concern, at the end of Andy's and Edie's collaboration, became this: how would or could Edie be integrated into conventional celebrity or stardom, such was her fame by this time. Hollywood, desperately trying to boost its sagging profits, made numerous overtures to the new product, but could not assimilate her into their ideological conventions without rupture. Several years later, when Viva was to be in the same position, Hollywood, even more desperate and with society at a crisis point, attempted to take advantage of widespread political upheaval by usurping controversial subject material, and could thereby accommodate her in marginal roles. Quickly Hollywood learned to incorporate almost any diluted ideology as long as it existed in the form of product that had a market place. These series of events make possible today the phenomenon of a film such as *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in which a star with a persona, however reactionary in its broader implications, unable to be incorporated easily into Hollywood, makes a 'semi-Hollywood' production (New York, young female director straight out of NYU, etc.) that allows her to keep her star persona intact, and serves also as a 'screentest' or a consumer survey to assess her 'target market.'

The threat that Warhol and Sedgewick posed to Hollywood ideology is most concisely portrayed in *Vinyl*. The structure of the film-making itself is at odds with Hollywood conventions, yet in this period Warhol began aping Hollywood films in earnest: *Vinyl* was not to be considered structuralist art. Ronald Tavel was commissioned to write "photoplays" for Warhol to film with real 'parts' for the stars to play. The Set, usually the Factory itself, Lights, Cue Cards, Soundtrack—all conventions were accommodated. For *Vinyl*, Warhol purchased the rights to Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. Once these Hollywood conventions were erected, Warhol then did everything possible to destroy them.

"During the filming of **Chelsea Girls**, when Ondine slapped Pepper in his sequence as the Pope, it was so for real that I got upset and had to leave the room—but I made sure I left the camera running."

Andy Warhol<sup>6</sup>

Gerard Malanga, in the role of Alex, wasn't permitted to read the script until moments before filming. Malanga had his copy placed in front of him on the set, quite obviously refer-



ring to it. Off-camera comments and instructions were clearly directed at the actors, visibly distracting them. The camera was dropped, etc. Warhol's strategy to destroy Hollywood values was to 'not direct' his movies. He sits behind the camera and watches what happens; the stars 'perform' however they may within the confines of story premise or routine. Warhol disengages himself from his product, unlike the Hollywood director manipulating and orchestrating his stars as props or as part of the *mise-en-scène*. Consistent with his Factory motif, Warhol lets the machine, the camera, do his work for him, with the resulting work, the product, the star image the actor is responsible for, given free reign. His suggestions to Ronald Tavel to "eliminate plot" and achieve "no plot" facilitated the highlighting of the actor's personality, the persona remaining similar to, if not the same as, the actuality of the person; story, plot, lighting, here more arbitrary than intended, did not contribute to the rendering of the star. The effect was akin to documentation, which in a sense it was: the documenting of the unrehearsed minutes of attempted drama, the filming of the filmic and pro-filmic events. For the actor, it was an extreme instance of the star vehicle in which the script was never finished, the final film a compilation of 'real' moments constructed from the performer's personality, and packaged, finally, as star.

.....

"I can only understand really amateur performers or really bad performers, because whatever they do never really comes off, so therefore it can't be phoney. But I can never understand really good, professional performers."

Andy Warhol

.....

*Vinyl's* star, Edie Sedgwick, was Warhol's perfect collaborator. On the extremely small set (from which the claustrophobic camera does not move), and within the limited *mise-en-scène*, the definitive screen version of *A Clockwork Orange* is enacted. In the foreground are Edie, seated on a trunk, and Gerard Malanga, either seated on a chair or standing. Gerard delivers his lines to someone off-screen while Edie watches him or turns to stare at the action which unfolds behind the two stars. Ondine sits slightly behind them, occasionally talking to Edie, but usually encouraging a leather man and a 'doctor,' Tosh Carillo, who, in the poorly lit background, are torturing a younger man, tearing his clothes off, dripping wax on his chest, or lethargically whipping him with belts. During the long first section of the film, Gerard delivers his tough-guy monologue from the script or cue cards in a forced, loud voice, yelling to be picked up by primitive sound equipment. Edie has obviously been told to sit on the trunk and not do anything, which she has difficulty doing. This strategy of two attractive stars foregrounded briefly prevents the audience from noticing the background action; however, Edie's inaction and Malanga's very consistent monologue eventually combine to forefront these 'behind-the-scene' activities. The story line invoked, in which Gerard as Alex commits delinquent acts while the doctors reprogram another juvenile, engrosses us because we realize that on this cheap set, without edits, the torture is actually happening, rendering all action credible and verisimilar. The audience is startled when Edie knocks over her glass, breaking her long pose, and, visibly aware of the disturbance, attempts to retrieve the glass. The diegesis is totally disrupted, the audience becoming aware of its voyeuristic activity and of watching a film, a documentation of a story being performed. Is Warhol working with Edie knowing well that she will assert her persona in this manner?



Or has Edie taken advantage of a one-take situation with a bit of up-staging? Not to be up-staged himself, Warhol, intentionally or not, soon drops the camera, asserting 'structuralist' concerns over story-telling. Edie's moment, her simple gesture, reasserts the nature of the real (pro-filmic) event, the act of viewing a film. The strategy involved shows a far greater understanding of Burgess' novel than Kubrick's later screen version. Kubrick's film ignores the issues of media manipulation and, very specifically, the manipulative nature of film, dealt with by the book, becoming itself analogous to the violent films used by the doctors on Alex in the reconditioning process. With its air of the spectacle, the elaborate sets and locations glamourize 'artistic' rape and pop violence, the oversaturation of sensation indulged in ignoring the negative value the book affixes to the phenomena. The idea of faithful transference of book to film isn't the point; the implicit positive value attributed to Alex/Malcolm MacDowall's acts of violence on women is. The sheer scale of Kubrick's movie contrasts unfavourably to the small, claustrophobic Factory set on which Edie's one gesture can alert the audience to an awareness of precisely these concerns.

After Warhol drops the camera, the film continues with a closer shot of Malanga/Alex's reconditioning. First tied to a chair and whipped, he then has a leather restraining hood placed over his head as "Nowhere to Run" by Martha and the Vandellas plays. Edie's hands can be seen floating in and out of the frame, obviously part of her dancing. The viewer is diverted from the last vestiges of the story line to the pop song on the soundtrack which endlessly repeats, "Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide," attention drawn back continually to Edie's dancing hands. Compelled to witness Alex/Malanga's torture, the audience is actually in the same position as Alex in Burgess' novel when his eyelids are pinned open, forcing him to witness endless films of violence, as Edie's hands, gesturing toward the song, remind us. Conversely, Alex's torture in *Vinyl* consists of being muzzled and blinded by the leather



hood, denied personhood and rendered a fetishized object, a reference to the position of the Hollywood star.

The film ends, story line abandoned, as Malanga is released and begins to dance to pop songs played over and over. Edie begins to dance as well, but is initially accosted by one of the 'doctors,' who attempts to hold her and prevent her from dancing. Edie, trying to ignore him, eludes his advances which, at this point in the proceedings, the post-story line stage, register as real and aggressive. In maintaining her independence and resisting the threatening actions, Edie asserts her autonomy, her very real disruptive power, both as the disrupter of the film, and as the radical personality her star persona encompasses, which cannot be controlled by either the authoritarian characters within the plot, or by attempts to control her behaviour by 'real' people in the pro-filmic world.

While the star persona created by lights, story, director, publicity, in essence, by the machinery of Hollywood both off-screen and in 'real-life,' might have in certain instances the potential to appear disruptive within the context of the largely reactionary ideology of Hollywood, its calculated effect results only in increased capital. As a gesture it is a hollow one, within and outside a film, used to increase public interest and profit, but threatening nothing. Edie's persona, capable of disrupting an entire film in collaboration with her director, also extended into the mass media, but much less comfortably. Her androgyny, her association with Warhol, her implicit feminism, her

wild, uncontrolled persona and its effects—all have only recently been recuperated in the form of tragedy. Rather than blame Warhol, it is perhaps more accurate to locate her downfall in her frustration in pursuing a broader film career through Hollywood, and its attempts to diffuse and co-opt her. The result, Edie being contained by stardom (the normal Hollywood condition) rather than creating it, set the stage for tragedy. She is to be remembered, however, for her role in *Vinyl*. In it the feminine is posited as the radical, and Edie Sedgwick as its superstar, as the disruptive centre of the film, and as Warhol's point of identification, on screen and off.

## THE CHELSEA GIRLS

"**Chelsea Girls** was the movie that made everyone sit up and notice what we were doing in films (and a lot of times that meant sit up, stand up, and walk out). Until then the general attitude toward what we did was that it was 'artistic' or 'camp' or 'a put-on' or just plain 'boring'. But after **Chelsea Girls**, words like **degenerate** and **druggy** and **nude** and **real** started to be applied to us regularly."

Andy Warhol<sup>®</sup>

THE LIMITATIONS OF EDIE'S STAR PERSONA can be seen in the area in which she was given the most freedom: beyond the restrictions of style, a coherent, cohesive articulation of intent would never be formulated by Edie, unlike Brigid Polk, Ondine, and Viva, who, to varying degrees of success, would. The star persona of Brigid was a completely unknown entity not only to Hollywood, but to the Factory as well. In Brigid, conventional notions of what constituted a star were completely revoked. She was overweight, not conforming to any standard of beauty. She was a drug-user. She could be incredibly sharp-tongued, and was a 'fag-hag,' and proud of it. If not for the Factory, it would have been absolutely impossible for Brigid ever to appear on the screen. This makes it all the more exciting to watch her, fearless and unapologetic, in *Chelsea Girls* (in which Warhol devotes large sections to the creation of the character "The Duchess"), \*\*\*\*, *Tub Girls*, and *Bad*.

*Chelsea Girls*, a three-hour epic of split-screen, colour and black and white, was further evidence of Warhol's fascination with Hollywood. Filmed at the Chelsea Hotel, it was a nod to *Grand Hotel*, Nico's role evoking Garbo's, and, in some ways, exceeding it. Although the film still has an affinity with the earlier strictures of structuralism, each of its segments is a complete narrative in itself, script abandoned in favour of improvisation. At this point Warhol would offer utter freedom to his actors, each 30-minute reel recording until it ran out, Warhol's only advice that this would be a 'remake of' or 'sequel to' one of his earlier films. Warhol cast his films not only with homosexuals and drug addicts, but also models, debutantes, and 'poor little rich girls,' most of whom, when faced with the freedom inherent in his filming process, revealed themselves as, at best, a 'look,' but more often as listless, unengaging. Unaware of the project they were part of, and unable to take advantage of situations which others used to the fullest, superstars such as International Velvet (*Chelsea Girls*), Ultra Violet (\*\*\*\*), and Tom Hompertz (*Lonesome Cowboys*) never managed to





engage the public in the kind of discourse that Ondine, Nico, and Brigid would in *Chelsea Girls*.

.....  
"Brigid in those days was incredibly hostile. (After playing the Duchess in *Chelsea Girls*, she actually stayed in that character for a couple of years.) . . . Merv began to get nervous that Brigid wasn't going to be so nice. He was right. Her attitude towards him was like he was a stranger annoying her in a bus depot—she was really giving him hostile looks, and once she even threw a pure amphetamine glare straight into the camera."

Andy Warhol<sup>9</sup>

.....  
Brigid Polk shocked the nation on September 14, 1967 on Merv. She would not deign to speak to Merv, infrequently or nastily answering questions, and offering insults on fellow celebrities, much to his chagrin. Griffin expected Hollywood protocol to extend to superstars, anticipating obsequiousness and flowery flattery, as was the norm, when mentioning Ultra Violet to Brigid. Instead Brigid offered vitriolic slurs, treating Griffin like a stranger (which he was) who was irritating her (which he possibly was). Brigid demonstrated an attempt to undermine the infrastructure of the Hollywood publicity machine, the function of the talk-show circuit, proving how easily its equilibrium could be destroyed. It was an accomplishment no Hollywood star would ever dare essay, but for Brigid it was simply a reprisal of her role in *Chelsea Girls*, making no attempt to appeal to or reassure nervous audiences.

.....  
Nico, coming to the Factory fresh from Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, had already asserted a screen persona, but it was to become much more extreme in connection with Warhol. Besides *Chelsea Girls*, she appeared in \*\*\*\* and *Imitation of Christ*, as well as in several non-Warhol films in Europe and the US. Originally from Europe, Nico had a Garboesque quality, sombre and morose. Just how incongruous such a persona would seem in the 1960s was not altogether clear in *Chelsea Girls*, which allowed for eccentricity, or even in the critically acclaimed *Velvet Underground* of which Nico was a member for one album. Certainly there were screen references for Nico, but in the context of a pop group her collaboration with the Velvet was unique. "The Velvet Underground and Nico" was an LP of extremes—moments of great joy and sorrow—and no other female singer could encompass what Nico did in her day: songs so drained of emotion, death-like and pale, a far cry from what popular culture demands of female singers.

But it was Nico's first and only appearance on *The Merv Griffin Show* that demonstrated most succinctly the extremes Nico embodied, resulting in a moment of disturbing radicalism. Nico came out and played a song with her harmonium from her first solo album, *The Marble Index*. She took the stage, the talk-show set, and sat down. Merv started his show biz chatter, but Nico refused to talk. She said not one word. Merv, live, began screaming on camera to someone off-screen, "Who is this woman? Who booked her on the show?" He was reduced to a blubbing idiot, and Nico had made her point. The facade of happy Hollywood had given way to reveal a man screaming at a woman who sat very still.



.....  
"There were stories . . . around in Queens that six motorcycle men grabbed me and hammered a pipe up my ass . . . I said, 'Let it spread; it's divine.'"

Pope Ondine<sup>10</sup>

.....  
As the Pope in *Chelsea Girls*, Ondine, the most interesting and extreme of the male superstars, was a startling combination of personae: the psychiatrist, the father confessor, and the size queen rolled into one, the latter persona transforming the authoritarian significance of the former two. Ondine was the male counterpart to Brigid's Duchess, the two royal figures sitting on high like weird inversions of Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper in old Hollywood, passing barbed judgement on the conduct of the other superstars while recklessly indulging, themselves, in their various excesses, particularly shooting speed. It was via Ondine that Warhol found in his films the most explicit and radical expression of a gay alter ego, one which remained unapologetically and adamantly homosexual (as Warhol, himself, tends not to be) without succumbing to the easily appropriable wiles of camp, or the distanced 'otherness' of the drag queens. To hear Ondine, as the personable, East Village-reared, Jewish boy who speaks his own disjointed yet familiar brand of New Yorkese, come out with the most outrageous queenisms, was profoundly alarming; and to see, as early as the '60s, a supremely confident, self-possessed gay character on screen was sufficient in itself to redeem Warhol/Drella's work from accusations of mere campiness.

Ondine's particular gay sensibility is most audaciously captured in Warhol's novel, entitled, simply, *a* ("a," like "Drella," a Warhol pseudonym). Like *Empire*, *a* was billed as a continuous event, a true slice of life, Drella reputedly following Ondine for 24 consecutive hours with a tape recorder, then transcribing it in novel form. As usual, the gimmick turned out





to be merely a publicity ruse—it was actually several separate recordings randomly juxtaposed. Nevertheless, it remains a tribute to Ondine's unflagging and merciless wit as he encounters and interacts with each thinly disguised Factory personality. With *a*, Warhol, however ingenuously, continues to rupture the outmoded conventions of art form, here, the novel, by introducing a highly exaggerated structuralist conceit. But it is again, as with his films, an inverted structuralism which, unlike its usual monolithic incarnations, allows its subject a freedom of expression. The weight of the radical gesture, then, lies with the specific personality whom Warhol has chosen, or who has chosen Warhol; Ondine makes *a* work.

.....

"I hate as many people a day as I can possibly crowd into it. Hate is a GREEat function. It's like taking a Ssshhhit."

Pope Ondine<sup>11</sup>

.....

In an analogous gesture to Edie's famous slip in *Vinyl*, Ondine's infamous slap in *Chelsea Girls* forces the issue of the artist/film-maker's control uncomfortably to the forefront. The Pope's reels have him dressed in his familiar black as the psychiatrist/confessor on a sparse, spotlighted set somewhere in the Factory, talking first to Ingrid Superstar, then to somebody's girlfriend, each on the couch. The nervous girl makes the fatal mistake of calling Ondine a phoney, an accusation which reveals her utter misunderstanding of the Warhol process, and her underestimation of the power of the superstar to extract from the artificiality of the Factory situation a reality

too extreme even, in this case, for the film-maker to witness. Ondine slaps the unwitting girl; Warhol leaves the room, but makes sure the camera is kept running. The ugliness of Ondine's reaction is undeniable, but in its amoral context, somehow not at issue. It is overwhelmed by the unsimulated spectacle of a superstar shooting up on the silver screen, and then erupting into a violent rage, rendering the bigger-than-life definition of the Hollywood star obsolete. Neither film nor film-maker can contain the radical implications of a gay Pope speed-freak; and his 'performance' pushes even the pro-filmic event itself too far. With Warhol out of the room and the camera still recording, Ondine, after humiliating the girl and forcing her to leave the frame, exits it himself, still yelling, and says that he can't go on. The camera records the empty space in its absurd structuralist neutrality until the Pope returns, reasserting his superstar persona.

Ondine's outrageousness was inseparable from his homosexual identity; and in the '60s, his and Andy's gay sensibility had not yet become stereotypical and non-threatening. Both were into motorcycle paraphernalia and black leather, shopped at the Leather Man in the Village, hung around with drag queens, and had a camp attachment to bitch goddesses and all-American studs long before a different set of Village people completely diffused the radical significance of, and commodified, the gay image. As the '70s witnessed the gradual dismantling of the threat posed by gay culture, Warhol became the media queen with *Interview*, regressing to a pure, empty camp aesthetic, and Ondine, canonized by the underground film circuit, who began to take his pseudonym seriously, became retroactively co-opted as a camp idol.



## VIVA'S WARHOL MOVIES

"We all loved Viva . . . She was funny, stylish, and photogenic—and she gave great interviews. She even wrote reviews of our movies for a local publication called **Downtown**, using the by-line of Susan Hoffman (her real name), giving herself, naturally, total raves: 'Viva! is a hilarious combo of Greta Garbo, Myrna Loy, and Carole Lombard . . . she combines the elegance of the Thirties with the catty candor . . . of the Sixties . . .'"

Andy Warhol<sup>12</sup>

**T**HE COLLABORATION OF WARHOL AND VIVA resulted in seven movies, two of which were never screened. After seeing "one of his boring movies, instead of the fabulous one, *Chelsea Girls*," as she puts it, Viva cornered Warhol at a party and told him she would like to be in one of his films. It was a decision made after having acted in the disastrous *Ciao! Manhattan*, and having witnessed the spectacle of Edie being shot up by her doctor on the set. In the present version of the post-Warhol Edie exploitation film, one can glimpse, in the early, black and white sections directed by Chuck Wein, the only on-screen meeting of Viva and Edie. Prophetic in that this was Edie's first post-Warhol film and Viva's first before Warhol, the moment, viewed now, is a tense, almost awkward one. The script calls for them to rush together and embrace as old friends, but previous to this moment, and directly after, both superstars stand some distance apart, encircled by their own friends, curiously, yet discreetly, examining one another. Something of the moment, one of the only two instances of Warhol superstars gathered together on one set in a non-Warhol film (the other being *Midnight Cowboy*) is telling: clearly only a matter of time before Viva, easily holding her own with Edie in this scene, meets Warhol.

Back at the party, Warhol asks Viva to meet him at an apartment the next day for filming but she'll have to take her shirt off, is that okay? Viva agrees and arrives to act in *The Loves of Ondine*, a vehicle for the superstar, pairing him with various models and designers who parade through segments, Warhol probably hoping for a repeat of the slap scene from *Chelsea Girls*. But it turns out to be another one of Andy's boring movies, only the scene with Ondine and Viva capturing the spark of the former film.

The scenario is this: Viva is a prostitute that Ondine has just picked up on the street, similar to other scenes in the film with women attempting to seduce Ondine and failing. The time comes for Viva to remove her shirt as per Warhol's instructions. Rather than just take it off, she demands Ondine pay her to do so. The Pope, placed in the awkward situation of having to indicate a measure of desire for Viva and having to accommodate Warhol's instructions, does so. As Viva carefully undresses, both Ondine and the audience discover she has put bandages over her nipples. Breaking out of character, he gasps, "Jesus Christ, she's got bandages on her nipples," gesturing past the camera to Warhol, and disrupting the diegesis. This succinct moment works on several levels. On Viva's part it's a clever mocking of censorship and the meaning of nudity in Warhol's films. It's also a clear demonstration to Warhol by Viva that she has understood his objectives, or, by popular conception, that she is 'in on the joke.' This kind of gesture is one method (but not the only one) by which Warhol

forces his films onto other levels, and Viva knows it. That she calmly sits back and smiles while Ondine flusters is proof that she has understood and is capable of taking the film in a newer, more political direction. The balance of power has shifted from Ondine to Viva, and the film never recovers. Coincidentally or not, Ondine's association with the Factory ended after this film, and Warhol took for granted that Viva would be in all future productions.

"Women's issues weren't even being discussed then; there was no large organized women's movement yet . . . Viva was unusual for those times—a girl who'd look into a camera and complain about cramps from her period, or tell men they were bad in bed . . . Viva was the first girl we'd heard talk that way."

Andy Warhol<sup>13</sup>

Viva made *Tub Girls* (as with *Loves of Ondine*, originally part of \*\*\*\*), *Bike Boy*, and *Nude Restaurant* for Warhol, each showing her ability to intensify situations by aligning herself with other women (Brigid Polk in *Tub Girls*) or gay men (Taylor Mead in *Nude Restaurant*), or by forcing a critique of the masculine role (*Bike Boy*). But it is *Lonesome Cowboys*

**"ANDY WARHOL'S 'LONESOME COWBOYS' MAY BE A BIT TOO MUCH FOR MANY PEOPLE. BUT THAT'S THEIR PROBLEM."**



## ANDY WARHOL'S LONESOME COWBOYS

'Lonesome Cowboys' is a magnificent and very funny satire of the American Western that is liberally seasoned with our favorite 4, 8, 10 and 12-letter words and a cornucopia of nudity and sexual carryings on that is—in combination—perhaps unprecedented!"

which remains Warhol and Viva's most notorious film together. The film was shot just shortly before Warhol was (with a gun by Valerie Solanis in '68); while recovering, he edited many hours of footage down to two. The films were standardized now, cut to two hours for increased theatrical distribution, and more defined in terms of structure, variety of shots, and narrative development. As if to compensate for this, they were to be completely ad-libbed by the actors. Viva brought purpose and meaning to the films, a conscious revolutionary position as opposed to Edie's intuitive rebelliousness. The Warhol/Viva partnership was timely: first a film about a bike boy, the current symbol of privileged male freedom and machismo, encountering a woman who critically assesses this machismo, and his ability to make love, immediately changing the film into a critique, rather than a celebration, of the stance, followed by *Lonesome Cowboys*, in which the American Cow-



boy, and the dream of a frontier tamed and controlled by the hard-riding male, would meet its nemesis. It was the responsibility of Viva to challenge these myths.

In *Lonesome Cowboys*, Viva plays Ramona, ostensibly the madam of a brothel called "the Big House," never shown and rarely alluded to, Viva only referred to in these terms by the Sheriff, the reactionary figure. The location is a ghost town peacefully inhabited by Viva and her 'nurse,' Taylor Mead, until Eric Emerson, Julian Burroughs, Joe Dallesandro, Tom Hoppertz, and Louis Waldon arrive. The first altercation takes place as the cowboys contemptuously greet Viva and Taylor Mead. Viva derides their masculine, macho posturing, but to no avail—Louis Waldon, their leader, drives the two away with a whip. At this point in the film the cowboys are still secure in their group identity, not at all ruffled by Viva. Subsequent scenes reveal the cowboys as brothers, but a family unit on shakey ground. It is also a unity composed of men only, a representation of the members of the nuclear family who stand to benefit most from its structure. The opposition to the power bloc consists of Viva, the sexually self-determining female, and Taylor Mead, the affirmed gay male. Several of the ensuing scenes illustrate their attempts to interact with the brothers. Taylor Mead's comic cruising of all the boys except Waldon, the eldest, results in failure, demonstrating the difference between his sexuality and the brothers'. Taylor's gay sexuality is stated and obvious and, while charming, is at the same time threatening; the brothers' unstated homosexuality—bathing and sleeping together, but retaining a heterosexual stance—is repressed and contained, and results in a rigid patriarchy. Louis Waldon must constantly restate why they must stay together, why the family unit must remain, yet all the younger boys are uncomfortable and wish to leave. Hoppertz wants to hitch to California to surf, Emerson to return to his ballet dancing in the east. Julian Burroughs remains on the fringe of the family, clearly uncomfortable in all-male company; perhaps Viva's and Julian's off-screen relationship, translated to the screen in a first name basis comradeship, makes his integration into the male unit impossible.

Viva's attempted seduction of the family members (Emerson, Hoppertz) to leave the unit temporarily confuses the brothers, and while they return to their pack, they have lost their enthusiasm. Louis Waldon, as the elder, chooses Viva/Ramona as the villain. His diatribes against her are supposed to convince the boys of the purity and righteousness of their mission: the preservation of the family. When this fails, the movie veers towards its turning point, the horrific rape of Viva. Conceived as a plot 'strategy' without Viva's knowledge, the brothers rip off her clothes and attempt to perform cunnilingus upon her, remaining fully clothed. As the kind of rupture of the diegesis performed in the other films, it fails, although it does have the effect of rendering the moment 'real' as opposed to acted. Viva draws the viewer's attention to the nature of the strategy: the male unit using rape to protect its power and assert its hostility toward the female. The moment is not easy to describe—as a real trespass against Viva, it invokes an anger in her that immediately halts the jokiness of the men, shocking them into silence. The significance of what has occurred is forced upon them and the viewer. The incident is akin to the Ondine slap scene in *Chelsea Girls*, but it is to Viva's credit that, where Ondine possesses the anger and initiates and controls the violence, Viva only uses her very real and justified anger to manipulate the moment; the violence is not of her making, but the repercussions are. From this point on, Viva will redefine the rest of the film. The kinds of tensions and oppositions which the characters acted on previously are destroyed, the family unit permanently disrupted rather than drawn together, several of the brothers

(Hoppertz, Burroughs, Emerson) choosing to align themselves with either Viva or Taylor Mead after this juncture. Only Waldon, the patriarchal figure, and Joe Dallesandro, in subsequent scenes, do not.

Frankie Francine's character, the sheriff, the double-talk of law and order, is introduced in this scene, never declaring himself on the side of the brothers, but claiming he can do nothing and deploring the promiscuous Viva for trying to "break up the brothers." The sheriff chides Joe for the "harmless prank that got too rough," and Joe claims that they were "just having fun" but it "got out of hand." Given that the rest of the brothers are absent and have disengaged themselves from the family unit, it is, significantly, Dallesandro's screen persona that is now asserting itself. From this point on in his career with Warhol/Morrissey, he remains an adjunct of the male authoritarian position, a perfect choice for the hysterically reactionary films of Paul Morrissey. As with the sheriff scene in *Lonesome Cowboys*, Morrissey's movies tend to place the blame for the evils of life on women, and one might assume that Morrissey did in fact direct this scene. However, since Warhol edited *Lonesome Cowboys*, in the context of a Warhol film we can read this aberrant scene for what it is: a description of the conspiracy of men to absolve themselves from guilt and transfer it to women (the "she was asking for it" mentality).

The following scene reveals the sheriff to be a transvestite, for men, the particular fetish of dressing in women's clothes which most often involves adopting the passive character traits thought to be female (the cultural signifiers of femininity), rather than engaging any radical notions of androgyny or a breakdown of rigid sex roles. The sheriff's performance is painful to watch, a hideous caricature of femininity punctuated by his questions: "Am I pretty? Do you think I'm pretty? Do you like my dress?" The sight of a beefy, 40-year-old, lantern-jawed hulk in a party frock is a grisly one. He returns to the role of sheriff, then dresses up once more to dance with Dallesandro. The sheriff's parody and Taylor Mead's remarkable androgyny are poles apart, the natural charm and jello-boned body of the latter featured in the Viva-Tom Hoppertz seduction scene. As the seduction takes place, Taylor wanders through, Viva welcoming him, Hoppertz not particularly disturbed by his presence. The implication is that in a society not governed by the dominating male, no one is excluded. The movie concludes with the dismantling of the male unit, Hoppertz leaving for California and Emerson off to the east as they'd planned, Dallesandro staying with the sheriff, Taylor with Viva, and Louis Waldon, the patriarch, abandoned and left alone.

.....

"I'd always wanted to do a movie that was pure fucking, nothing else, the way **Eat** had been just eating and **Sleep** had been just sleeping. So in October '68 I shot a movie of Viva having sex with Louis Waldon. I called it just **Fuck**."

Andy Warhol<sup>14</sup>

"Look at Pope Paul kissing that naked foot. Now if that isn't pornographic!"

Viva<sup>15</sup>

.....

Warhol would make one last film, unfortunately leaving the direction to others. *Blue Movie (Fuck)*, starring Viva, played in New York for one week before being shut down by the vice squad. In the culmination of his fascination with his superstars, Warhol would film Viva actually having sex; that he would film, in the context of a story, this undeniably real, private moment is a fitting end to his cinematic project. After this, Viva ended their career together, and, despite offers, would not return to Warhol.







## VIVA IN HOLLYWOOD

**D**ESPITE HOLLYWOOD'S INCLINATION towards a more alternative sensibility at the end of the '60s and early '70s, it still couldn't accommodate Viva in a major role. This meant that all her Hollywood films would be "cameos" in the true sense of the word: not supporting roles, but special appearances, and seen as such within the film. In each of her three movies within the industry, *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), *Cisco Pike* (1972), and *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), she would either be seen or spoken of before her major scene, the lighting or atmosphere noticeably changing to render her persona. In Hollywood film, Dietrich's role in *Touch of Evil* might be a reference point, except that Viva's moments are ideologically complete in themselves, presenting a subversive image that runs against the rest of the film. It isn't necessary to look deeply into the entire film to examine her roles; suffice to say that all three films attempt to undo Viva's persona and somehow dismiss it, but fail. The effort each film must make to take on her presence makes recuperation impossible, an indication of the use minor roles can be put to in film to make statements that otherwise couldn't be made.

.....  
 "Art is unnecessary."

Viva<sup>16</sup>

.....  
*Midnight Cowboy*, filmed during Warhol's hiatus in the hospital and before his separation from Viva, features the superstar playing a film/video-maker, an obvious reference to Warhol. During Viva's major scene, a huge party in a loft, many of the superstars appear, including Ultra Violet, Paul Morrissey, and Taylor Mead (who seems to be edited out of most current prints). It is this scene, hinging on Viva, that made her representative of the entire Factory, quite probably enabling her autobiographical novel *Superstar*, published a year later, to function as *the* account of the Factory.

Viva first appears during a scene in a restaurant in which the two lead characters, Joe Buck/Jon Voight and Ratso Rizzo/Dustin Hoffman, are discussing their fortunes. At this point in the film their luck has run out, and the two men are destitute and desperate. Viva represents the turning point for the characters. Playing Gretel, Viva enters the restaurant with her brother, Hansel, two 'innocents' in the mire of New York who will alter the lives of the two men. She slowly cruises the diner, stopping at Joe Buck, and says to her brother, "him"; Hansel gives Joe an invitation to the party and the couple strolls out. Immediately mistrustful, Rizzo comments on the weirdness of the two, but Joe is determined that they will attend. When they arrive, the building and staircase appear quite normal. Only the strains of eerie music can be heard as they slowly ascend the dimly lit stairs. The doors are flung open to reveal a shock of bright lights, colour, and Viva, greeting them. She directs her brother, beside her with his porta-pack, to film them, and ushers Joe and Ratso into a cacophony of sensation. Ultra Violet dances topless in front of a film of herself, waving fans made from a photograph of her. A light show flashes constant colour, Joe smokes drugs, and the audience sees interviews on the video monitor as Viva and her brother film. Ratso, at the buffet, stuffs his pockets full of food, and Viva asks, as her brother films, "Why are you stealing the food?" Ratso is on alert and looks for a quick exit, but Viva calms him, chiding, "Well it's free, you know. You don't have to steal it." Later, Ratso sits between Ultra Violet and Viva,

who asks him why he's nervous and begins to lick the sweat off his face. Very uncomfortable with the attention, he yells at her to leave him alone, "Why are you licking me?" Viva yells louder, "Cause you're so hot, I'm licking the sweat off your face!" The camera is turning away from her, giving the impression that the moment was improvised, but catches these final words, and, with them, the sense that Viva, master of the ad lib after years with Warhol, has stolen the scene, offering a final push towards Ratso's downfall.

Although Viva has physically left the film after this point, her indelible image returns in the next scene. Joe Buck, the Times Square hustler, has met at the party the woman (Brenda Vaccaro) who is willing to change his luck. They adjourn to a darkroom and, bathed in red light, sensuously discover each other, huge blow-up portraits of Viva surrounding them. It is entirely appropriate that in this moment, when Joe Buck's fantasy has finally become reality, it is under the gaze of Viva.

In the world of the party, Viva's world, the realm of pleasure and sensuality conducted by the female, all wishes are granted, "the food's free," and dreams come true (Joe's fantasy of his work as pleasure). Ratso's masculine ego cannot tolerate situations in which he doesn't dominate, as he does in the relationship with Joe, acting as pimp. But it is his insistence on taking control, on leaving the party and negotiating the relationship with the woman, that leads directly to his fatal seizure, falling down the stairs, an abrupt descent from 'heaven.' Although *Midnight Cowboy* as a whole would have us believe in the sacrosanctity of heterosexual male bonding, a state of brotherhood preferable to an attachment to or association with the female, it has a hard time believing this message itself. In offering a world of freedom and pleasure in Viva and her party, the film offers a glimpse of a female or matriarchal utopia (with its video and photographic immortality) as an alternative to the pain and death depicted in the masculine realm, a sentiment posited implicitly in *Lonesome Cowboys*.

.....  
 "Andy calls Viva.

'We've got fifty thousand dollars to make a movie in Venice with you. A remake of **Summertime**. But instead of the Italians only being interested in sex, we're going to have YOU the one who's only interested in sex. The Italians are looking for love. They rebel against you and throw you in the canal.'

'In the middle of winter?'

'Yeah.'

'You know the canals are pretty polluted.'

'Yeah.'

'How much money?'

'Two thousand dollars.'

'Not enough. Call my agent.' "

Viva from *Superstar*<sup>17</sup>

"I thought they told me this would be a real role where I wouldn't have to take my clothes off, but here I am again, nude."

Viva in *Lion's Love*

.....  
 After *Midnight Cowboy*, Viva made her last Warhol film, *Fuck*, in 1969, the same year that the former film was released, its success giving her the opportunity to choose one



of three lead roles in Agnes Varda's *Lion's Love*. The film deals with such concepts as 'playing' on and off screen personae, reality versus the filmed image, and Hollywood and persona, working particularly well in Viva's case because of her affinity with the idea of acting the pro-filmic event, already a large part of her persona. Viva attempts to extend the focus of the film with the interaction between her and film-maker Shirley Clarke (*Portrait of Jason*) and her succinct comment on Bobby Kennedy: "He was the greatest actor." As an avant-garde film, *Lion's Love* concerns itself with the filmic project of Agnes Varda, and does not significantly extend or alter Viva's persona, but it is a good example of her ability to carry the impetus of a film.

*Cisco Pike* was Viva's second Hollywood film, made at the time of her first pregnancy. Drug dealers and corrupt cops enter the life of the title character, a singer on the skids played by Kris Kristofferson, the film also featuring performances by Harry Dean Stanton, Karen Black, and Gene Hackman. Viva's first shot is in a recording studio that Cisco enters, with various people sitting behind a sound board watching a performer. When the camera enters (Cisco's point of view), only Viva turns to look. After this introduction, Viva meets with Cisco and a woman friend in a bar as they search for drugs. Intercepted by a policeman, Viva manages to extract them from potential danger. Later, at Viva's home, the three climb into bed. In a scene evocative of the final moments of *Vinyl*, Viva manages to distance herself sufficiently from the 'action' to retain her independent stance, even displaying a certain indifference to the attentions of Cisco/Kristofferson, alluding to her bisexuality, more clearly stated in her 'novel' *Superstar* published the same year. In it, numerous accounts of her affairs with women proudly declare her bisexuality, just one aspect of her radical position outlined in this ground-breaking book.

Released in 1972, *Play It Again, Sam* is Viva's last Hollywood film. A combination of events contributed to the discontinuation of this career: 1972 marked the beginning of the end of radical impetus in Hollywood; and Viva and her husband, Michel Auder, began filming the video documentary of their daughter Alexandria. Viva's part in the early Woody Allen vehicle is short, but significant, and consistent with her persona in other films. The director has been forced to make provisions to cope with her presence, the lighting and atmosphere entirely different from the rest of the film.

Allen/Allen is searching for a date after his divorce as the 'ghost' of Bogart offers dating advice. He is paired with various inappropriate women until he finds his 'true love.' Along the path, he somehow manages to get a date with Viva/Jennifer, and taxis to her home; shot from a low angle, it is signified as that of a successful woman. The next shot is of Viva reclining in a hammock, surrounded by ferns, a perfect reproduction of a 1930s pose from a Dietrich or Garbo vehicle. By associating Viva with a Hollywood icon, she becomes the female equivalent to Bogart, who functions as Allen's ego-ideal. Because her position is parallel to Bogart's on an iconic level, Allen's intended use of Viva as the object of humour in their scene together fails. (Viva as an 'in joke': the avant-garde slut, who sleeps with everyone, is rejecting Allen.) Viva speaks of her wild sexual proclivities, maintaining an active independence, but rejects Allen's lewd advances, affirming her right to choose. Unlike the other, unwitting female characters in the film, Viva's persona overcomes the limitations of the script, enabling her to turn the tables on the generally misogynistic level Allen's films work on. Viva pushed her scene so far out of the ideological project of the film that it no longer fits; perhaps as an indication of this, it is generally edited out of television screenings.

## THE STATE OF THINGS

"My only fans are those who see me on film. Once they get to know me, they're no longer a fan. I'll have to make some angelic kind of virgin movie."

Viva<sup>18</sup>

**I**N *THE STATE OF THINGS* (1980), WIM WENDERS' 'remake' of *Chelsea Girls*, Viva asserts her utterly consistent star persona in an autobiographical performance which, once again, gives her the opportunity to overturn notions of gender. Much of this film about film-making takes place in a hotel in Lisbon during the hiatus of a science fiction film shoot that has run out of money, the plot alluding variously to *Grand Hotel*, *Chelsea Girls*, and *8 1/2*. Viva/Kate plays the wife of Friedrich (the Swiss director of the film) and the mother of their two daughters; in real life she was married to a French video artist and has two children, one of whose babyhood is documented in Viva's very thinly disguised second novel, *The Baby*, in which her husband's name is Frederick. As the camera moves voyeuristically from hotel room to hotel room, it captures, in one scene, a conversation between Kate and Friedrich. She scolds him for not being able to feel, and tells him to hold still while she has her pleasure, sitting on him naked like a strange bird, arms bent, head back, as the children listen ("Do you think they're fucking?"). The film, which seems mostly improvisational, gives Viva the chance to redefine the role of wife by expressing her straightforward sexual freedom, taking her pleasure from the uncooperative husband within ear-shot of her daughters.

In another scene, Kate sits on the edge of a cliff with her daughters, attempting to paint the landscape of the Lisbon coast. She tries to explain how everything is made of shade and light, which makes form, but begins to cry because she can't draw it. As the Virginia Woolf character, Viva, as always, is equally at ease expressing a feminine quality which, alongside her sexually aggressive activity, culturally defined as masculine, makes her persona far more threatening; in its balance and confidence, it can never be reduced to the merely aberrant or deviant.

We hope that this 'story' will contribute to the re-evaluation of Warhol's films, and, more particularly, to the recognition, long overdue, of Viva's work in film, video, and literature. We also urge alternative film/video centres to investigate the possibility of bringing Viva and her work to Toronto ASAP. □

## NOTES

1. Andy Warhol, *From A to B and Back Again*, London, Picador, 1976, p. 160.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
3. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980, p. 222.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *Loc. cit.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
7. *From A to B*, p. 79.
8. *POPism*, p. 184.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
10. Andy Warhol, a, New York, Grove Press, Inc., 1968, p. 199.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
12. *POPism*, p. 231.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 266.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
15. Viva, *Superstar*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970, p. 288.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 300.



*'Round Midnight:* Tavernier directs Dexter Gordon in the New York hotel.



We have been great admirers of Tavernier's films for many years. For us, his work represents the completely convincing revalidation of the great and complex Realist tradition exemplified by, for example, Renoir and Rossellini, but also the major Hollywood film-makers, that has been so much under attack in this age of deconstruction, anti-Realism, self-reflexivity and Post-Modernism. He has produced what is arguably the most substantial and impressive body of work by any European film-maker since the advent of the New Wave, work that has been (predictably enough) ignored by the dominant schools of 'advanced' film theory/criticism.

It was an honour and a pleasure for us to meet Tavernier during the 1986 Toronto Film Festival. At very short notice, and in the midst of a very tight schedule, he went out of his way to accommodate us, ending up giving us more than double the time we had been officially allocated (if the interview seems to end rather abruptly, it is because the tape ran out!). In all printed interviews one inevitably misses important components: tone, inflection, gesture. This is especially true in the case of Tavernier. He talked copiously, responding eagerly to our questions, continuously communicating an enthusiasm that was, inseparably, both emotional and intellectual (a unity characteristic also of his films). His English is extremely fluent but also highly idiosyncratic, the excitement resulting in unfinished sentences and the repetition of words and phrases. While perfectly comprehensible when accompanied by intonation, emphasis and gesture, his discourse looked occasionally obscure when transcribed to paper. I have taken the liberty of tidying it up, whilst trying to preserve the flavour.

We wish to thank the publicity staff of Warner Brothers for their flexibility and considerateness in helping to make the interview possible.

**Florence Jacobowitz  
Richard Lippe  
Robln Wood (editor)**



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# THE SURVIVAL OF MISE-EN-SCENE:

## An interview with Bertrand Tavernier

**ROBIN WOOD:** *It's a great pleasure to meet you. What I was going to suggest was that we work our way through your films chronologically . . . from The Clockmaker on, ending with 'Round Midnight. But we can always digress if we want to, on the way.*

**BERTRAND TAVERNIER:** Okay, okay, as you like. Shoot.

**RW:** *All right. Would you like to talk about the adaptation of Simenon, because it's very striking I think, how Simenon's book is completely apolitical and you have made a very political film from it?*

**BT:** I've always been in love with Simenon. I think he is one of the greatest writers now, I mean in the French language. But the book as you know, was set in America . . . And I don't completely agree that it's not political. I mean there are things about the book, about people who are immigrants, not completely at ease in the society and somebody who commits a crime related to the kind of nihilistic crime committed in America in the '30s which is a reaction against a certain type of society, which made the story more, I would say, more social than you think and just by the way that Simenon got a certain atmosphere and a certain loneliness in the American society, of somebody who cannot adapt. And I was always sensitive to that. Simenon was not only a creator of atmosphere but he knew how to get the social roots and some very perceptive things in the human being which for me created a lot of emotion and I was in love with that. But I didn't want to do an American film and I tried to transpose it to my native city, Lyons, and to the period and by transposing to the period which was not the period of control when Simenon wrote his book I had to face certain things, certain facts and it's true that I wanted the thing to be more political not only because I was maybe more but because the period was more and I wanted to reflect the period. I chose Aurenche and Bost after looking at some of their films not, as it is always being said (which is crazy), as a reaction against the New Wave, as a kind of declaration of war against the New Wave, because I liked a lot of directors and I respected a lot of directors.<sup>1</sup> It was because I saw that Aurenche and Bost were good and I was surprised by seeing some of their old films how good their work was and sometimes the mistakes, the heavy things, were more the director than themselves. I think they had an ability for dialogue. They knew how to make different kinds of persons talk and they had a kind of anarchistic and political sense which I liked, which I loved and which has not changed. I mean they did things which were brave. I mean to do a film like *Douce* where at the end of a scene Marguerite Moreno says to some poor people, 'Patience and resignation', and Roger Pigaut says, 'Impatience and

revolt.' In 1943, to a German, that was meaningful. That was more difficult than to do any kind of political statement in '68, more risky. And I respected them tremendously but I wanted to use them the way I think Otto Preminger wanted to use Dalton Trumbo or some people wanted to use Ring Lardner, Jr., because they were good writers. And again I've always been very angry against people who said that this choice put me against Truffaut and so on. I always thought that Truffaut was wrong in criticizing so much Aurenche and Bost. I mean he was right on a few points but most of the time he should have attacked the directors. Like in his well-known example, his article where he shows the difference between Aurenche and Bost's work and some other film by picking up *Under Capricorn* and *Les Orgueilleux*. It has always struck me as a wrong example. It takes a line of dialogue in *Les Orgueilleux* which he opposed to a visual thing. I mean I can do the opposite. I can say, let's give Hitchcock the dialogue of the scene in *Les Orgueilleux*, and without changing a line he will do a great scene. What is bad is that the last line, 'Take our tenderness,' is done in a very heavy way by Allégret. If Hitchcock had done the scene he would have had it lighter, more ironic, maybe in a distant shot instead of a close shot, the scene would be completely different. And on the other hand, the idea of *Under Capricorn*, of the coat held behind the glass, I always thought that could have been an idea from a screenwriter, not an idea from a director and I asked last year Hume Cronyn whom I met, 'In that scene, as you wrote the screenplay, was it your idea or Hitchcock's?' He said, 'You know, in all the films I did with Hitchcock, Hitchcock was responsible for 99 percent of the scene but that's one thing I'm proud of, because I had this idea and I told it to Hitchcock who loved it and he shot it incredibly well.' But it was the idea of a screenwriter and I've always been mad because Truffaut was wrong. The people I'm against are the people who follow Truffaut's idea without replacing it in the context and still going on with that crazy war which is meaningless. So I mean in this adaptation anyway, Aurenche and Bost helped me and I wanted to have the same relationship with the writer, that relationship which was helping the movie, and it's something which I'm still proud of in *The Clockmaker*. I think it gives a good impression certainly of France in that period and it was very, very difficult to do it. I mean to convince people it took us, in spite of the help of Philippe Noiret, about 14 months to get it financed. I felt that I was faithful to Simenon's concept, although 80 percent of the script was original. Even if we were looking to do the opposite: I wanted to do a Simenon film without fog, rain and wet streets. I wanted to do a Simenon story in the summer and get to the same emotion by opposite means. Simenon speaks about loneliness and he shows a lonely



man. I think for me it was more interesting to speak about loneliness with somebody who is in the middle of a lot of friends because you can be lonely in that situation too. And also, I wanted the film to have that political freedom and that violence that Prévert had. That's why I wanted to dedicate the film to him and I called him and he said, 'What is the story?' I said, 'It's somebody who kills somebody, he works in a factory . . .' Prévert said, 'It's not the worst thing he could do.' And then he said, 'Who are you working with?' And I said, 'Georges Aurenche and Pierre Bost.' He says, 'Don't tell me anymore, their presence is a guarantee of the moral rightness of the film.' For me, that was a wonderful compliment.

**RW:** *I don't see Simenon as being very interested in political activism and what you've done in the film is to convert a meaningless crime, a nihilistic crime as you say, the existential acte gratuit or something like that, into a politically motivated action. That seems a very crucial change.*

**BT:** Yes, that's true, that's true, but what I kept from Simenon is the movement of somebody who is discovering and admitting his son's actions, and I like that idea, plus the sudden moment of somebody opening a little bit, and I find that very moving. But Simenon also wrote books which were more politically conscious. I mean he wrote certain things about colonialism which are very, very strong. I used some of the things that he described in *Coup de Torchon*, even when he was a journalist. There has been a very interesting book in France made up of the articles of Simenon and half of the book was devoted to the articles he wrote about Africa in the 1930s and some of them were very, very strong and one of them was called "One dead white every kilometer, one black every railroad tie." He was talking about the number of black people who were killed during the building of the railroad. And he did some very interesting things. I mean Simenon always said that he was very influenced by Chekhov, and he wanted to speak, about the naked man, the man, when you take away the civilization, civilized protection, what you get. So when you have a writer who speaks about that kind of thing it's very easy, because those emotions are very true, to build a social background around them. When it's impossible with writers like James Hadley Chase, it's absolutely impossible because the emotion they are speaking is completely false. Why a lot of films based on Simenon, starting with *Les Inconnus dans la Maison*, are interesting is because socially the reasons, the explanation, the characterization are strong and deep. So if you want to add some social element to that, it fits very easily. It doesn't go against the story. With some other writers the emotion is not true. But it's true that I wanted to be political. I was angry against many things in France at that time, and I think it's good to be angry when you are doing a film.

**RW:** *That feeling is carried over into your next two films too, the two historical films, Que la Fête Commence and Le Juge et L'Assassin; which I tend to see as a pair.*

**BT:** It's a trilogy for me. It's three films about justice and the relationship to justice of injustice and an idea of giving to an actor the possibility of going through French historians and French classes, I mean the average man of the 20th century, the aristocrat of the 18th century and the bourgeois of the 19th century. And I think it's very, very good because Noiret goes through all those people of different classes very easily and he gives in each a great characterization. . .

**RW:** *Yes, yes, he's wonderful.*

**BT:** . . . and in three moments of French history. It's three

moments dealing with justice and injustice and it's three moments where the echo of the fight, of all that is happening in France, reflects in the main character. This is especially what interested me a lot in *The Judge and the Assassin*. It was in the *fait divers* at the beginning, that the two characters catch the resonance of what's happening in France around then and that when I was reading newspapers of the time, I was struck by the fact that Bouvier, the murderer, went through all the institutions of the 19th century, the army, the church, the hospital, the lunatic asylum, the psychiatrist and the prison. He crossed everything and it's not something we invented and I was fascinated by that, going through all those things and every time catching something of the institution. I told Galabru, I mean as a principle of acting, 'Sometimes I want you to give me the impression that you are reciting something that you know by heart, that you maybe have learned in the army, in the church, in the hospital.' And he did it beautifully, so you never know when it's his line or the thing that he learned. I mean he got impregnated and that was interesting and, of course, the three films had to deal with the relationship between two people, two actors. I like that, I mean those confrontations, with a style of dialogue which I like in Aurenche who is so violent and so anarchistic and funny, and with a special poetic sense. I mean he's a splendid writer, and you can see very well why he was friends with a lot of surrealists at the time and that he still at 81 attacks the army, religion, I mean he's still at war and it's great and with a lot of bravura, fun. He's not, he's never mellowed, which is wonderful, which is wonderful.

**RL:** *Do you relate the use of Philippe Noiret in Coup de Torchon to these earlier films?*

**BT:** I think in *Coup de Torchon* he combines the judge and the assassin, combines two characters in one. I mean as Jean Genet told me, after seeing *Coup de Torchon*, 'It's the most beautiful theme you treated, which is how to become a saint and a martyr through crime and abjection,' which is essentially the theme, of course.

**RW:** *The Clockmaker is the only one of the films in which the Noiret character actually improves as the film goes on, I think, isn't it? In all the others he deteriorates progressively.*

**BT:** Yes, yes, but in all the others it's another character who improves. It can be Isabelle Huppert in *The Judge and the Assassin*. I was at this moment very much influenced by somebody like Fuller who said that the spokesman always had to be the woman, and it fitted the story because I could not see how in *The Judge and the Assassin* somebody like the judge could change. I think that I should have made him a little more sympathetic, to make understandable how he betrayed more, and maybe if I was changing a few things, I would add two or three lines to make his point of view more understandable. I was a little bit too angry against him but I think, of all the three films, I think it's where Noiret gave the most interesting composition because it's something very different from everything he did everywhere else.

**RW:** *It's interesting that both Que la Fête Commence and Le Juge et L'Assassin culminate very abruptly in the eruption of a female revolutionary in the last minutes.*

**BT:** It was always criticized and I think I missed it at the end of *The Judge and the Assassin* and I still like it at the end of *Que La Fête Commence* because you can read it too as part of the period without any symbolism because it's true that it was during the Regency period that they attacked the carriage of some noble people for the first time. So you can



read it just as something fitting the period. But I think it's lyrical and I like the use of the music at the end, written by the regent himself. It's very rarely been studied: the fact that the music he's writing shows a complete other side of his character. And *The Judge*, I shot it too quickly. I was very much under the influence of Brecht at that time and trying to end up by provoking the audience and I think I shot it too quickly. I mean I was still fighting for the idea.

**RW:** *It stands up very well.*

**BT:** I still think about the ideas. I think the set should have been better. The flag should have been dirtier. It's too clean. But I think I found the real idea for the scene six or seven years later. I mean I should have had the army, the factory, Isabelle Huppert, but the judge passing by, just going home and looking at that and seeing that and not doing anything and it would have been more moving, his not daring to do anything and you understand that it's going to take fire. And it's like Billy Wilder told me, 'Ten years after *The Apartment* I awoke in the middle of the night and said, *here is how I should have done that scene.*'

**FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ:** *There seems to be a movement in your work from the earlier films which have a more direct political expression, whether it's about social classes or in *Que la Fête Commence* revolution, to a different kind of politics in your later work, except perhaps *Coup de Torchon*. But in *Une Semaine de Vacances* and in *Sunday in the Country* it seems that you're moving towards familial politics.*

**BT:** I think it's because things are changing around me. I'm changing maybe a little bit. I mean my politics have not changed. I'm still fighting in the directors' union for a lot of things, fighting the government to protect the right of the directors. Things have changed and we've had several disillusionments. It happened in Cambodia and in Vietnam, even in France, the historic relationship between the Communist Party and the Socialist Party, and it was difficult sometimes. And maybe you feel that disillusion in *Une Semaine de Vacances* which reflects I think very accurately some feelings about France, doubts that we had in France in the period. But I'm still angry against a lot of things. I think I will do something which will be maybe more political, depending on what you want to do in the film. It was impossible in *Sunday in the Country*. That would have been crazy. And, too, there is a way of fighting. My anger in *Sunday in the Country* and in a way *'Round Midnight* is translated into the form of the film as a kind of free action against something which is the biggest danger which ever happened, the biggest censorship of the cinema, the form, the direction and the story-telling which is the influence of TV commercials and the films aimed at the so-called young audience, films which have no point of view and which try to sell the emotion of violence instead of exploring. I mean all those films look like their own trailers, films which look as if they were made by the guy who is in charge of post-production. There was a time in Hollywood when, apart from the great directors' films, you had studio films or genre films, films which were aiming at different publics. You had films of which people said, they are not directors' films, they are writers' films, or stars' films. Now it's not even that. Most of these films are not writers' films. They look as if they were made in the editing room by adding three or four songs when people cannot handle the scene. They relate to that statement of George Lucas who supposedly says to the people who work with him, 'Don't give me scenes, give me shots,' which is a very intelligent cynical statement but which could describe very well a lot of films

now. You just have to compare that with Hawks saying, 'A good film is five or six great scenes and something in between.' And the films I want to do are very, very much in reaction against that brainwashing of the audience. I want to have films where people have time to think, time to see the emotion, and I want films without plot twists. To be even more precise, I think that in *'Round Midnight* there are several things which make strong comments about racism, and the best way to deal with that is to get the rhythm, the pace, the feeling, the mood of those people who create the music, to have a film which seems to go with the same internal rhythms that they have, which have the same flow that they have. That's the best way to respect those people. I'm not trying to impose my culture, my knowledge upon them and it's the best way to show those people as creators, which has never been shown by Hollywood, and for the moment, the reaction of the black musicians who have seen the film, some of the black originals, is great: 'This is the first time that there is somebody who is treating, speaking about our culture. How can a French director understand so well, when people like Spielberg, an American director, do not relate at all to our feelings?' But I would like to do next a film of the McCarthy period, the blacklist, and the next film will be violent, against religion, I mean it's about the Middle Ages. It will be a tough film. But it's true that I wanted for a while to have scenes where the social and political elements were more immersed in the story and more kind of day-to-day things maybe because that was something I felt very strongly was happening in France. I wasn't influenced consciously by that fear of slogans, that fear of great declarations, after everything that happened to us in France. We are very, very careful, and we feel sometimes that we are being betrayed by the people in whom we had great hope. Even as film directors we have been betrayed by the Socialist government when they created a fifth channel and they authorized them to cut our films when it was the opposite of everything that Mitterand promised us. It's bad, because that government had been great for the movies, great for the arts, and it suddenly just for small political reasons did the opposite in the end. And it's strange, it's now a right wing government which issued a law where you cannot do more than one cut in a film on television. It's a new law done by Léotard and which is something important. It looked like a small fight, but France has been the country where we could protect the right of the filmmaker, of the author, and if that was abandoned we knew how we could have been threatened and knew all the same type of thing that happened in America could happen, starting with colorization and all that stuff, and destroying the films.

**RW:** *One of the things I've long admired in your films is the way in which you consistently integrate social concerns and metaphysical concerns, which I think very seldom happens. You either get films that are about social problems or that are political films or you get films that are about, say, old age or death but I'd . . .*

**BT:** But I mean how can you separate that?

**RW:** *Exactly. Because people are growing old in a particular society, not just in a vacuum.*

**BT:** Yes. I mean always . . .

**RW:** *And how you face death is going to depend on it.*

**BT:** I've always been fascinated by the relationship between the character and the environment. I mean I've been interested in that in writing the script and even in the direction, maybe because my influence came from three or four different sources, came from some of the writers of the 19th cen-



tury, I mean Zola, Victor Hugo, who had a great, great influence. It came from some stage director, Jean Villard, or Planchon, who had a way of handling certain plays in which you understood what was the meaning of Marivaux and the relationship between servant and master. And so Marivaux was not something abstract, it was something cruel, funny, and you were seeing the whole world, and that had a great influence. Theatre had a tremendous influence on me: I remember having seen some plays which marked me for life. And the next thing is when I was working as press agent and critic, it's all the excitement which was first generated by the MacMahonists<sup>2</sup> in the relationship between the decor and the characters as expressed, for instance, in the films of Joseph Losey or Fritz Lang, and in a way I think John Ford, to show how the character is related to what is around him and related not only realistically but, I would say, metaphysically, how decor can be the prolongation of what is inside a character. It's why I like those camera movements which are not done to describe the decor, which try to unite, to *immerse* a character in the decor and that I love. I'm very, very, very interested in that, so the character should not be a tourist in the decor and it's something which I'm proud of. In *Coup de Torchon* I think you cannot separate Noiret from this little African town, he belonged there. And the same with Dexter Gordon in the hotel room, the same way Ducreux in his own house. I mean his house seems made for him. And again I say it's not only realistic treatment for me, it's much more than that, it's getting the relationship between several different emotions and that is something I'm more and more preoccupied with showing.

**RW:** *Perhaps carried furthest in A Week's Vacation.*

**BT:** That was the first one which I started . . .

**RW:** *There was a wonderful focussing of a contemporary female consciousness in that film.*

**BT:** Yes, the sense of doubt. What she was feeling was very much in tune with the city of Lyons and with the winter lights. There was no separation for me, and it's the first film where I think I began to realize completely what I wanted to do. I mean that was *A Week's Vacation*. It's one of the films I'm most proud of. I mean it's . . .

**FJ:** *It's one of my favourite films.*

**BT:** And too, because it's something which I'm getting with the actor which they don't try for in the usual way. They don't try to play on charm, to be fancy. They are ready, they don't try to protect their own image. I liked that from Noiret in *Coup de Torchon*, *Que la Fête Commence*, *Le Juge et L'Assassin*, and I liked that from Natalie Baye, from a lot of actors that I worked with. It is the great *forte* of a lot of French actors. It's the opposite, let's say, of Shirley Maclaine in *Terms of Endearment*, where you see somebody protecting her own image and destroying the character, always refusing to be nasty.

**FJ:** *I was just going to say, it's wonderful how you intercut long shots of Lyons or the countryside with the character in the middle of the scene and play back and forth between what they're thinking and shots of the city, which I think really underlines what you're saying.*

**BT:** I have always been interested by that. I hate to use decor as establishing shot, medium shot. There are very, very few shots where you see somebody entering a house or entering a place in my films, very, very, very few shots. When I want to describe, the settings are shown through somebody's eyes piece by piece and when I do a long shot of landscape . . . I started that in *The Clockmaker* after

Noiret says 'She left me, so it's as if I've been a widower for a long time,' I cut . . . I remember that I needed—I could not explain why—three or four shots of the city, which are not related. I mean he's not going somewhere. It's just some shots of the places which seemed to me going with the emotion at that time and what he was feeling, and I love to integrate that kind of a scene with a character. I love that, I mean to have a shot which has not an explanatory reason, it's not to locate a place, it just goes I think with feeling. It's something which I felt in certain directors, like Delmer Daves, who in some of his westerns absolutely integrated the landscape with the mood and the emotion of the character. In films like *The Hanging Tree* or *3:10 to Yuma* I saw what you could do when you are trying to do that and where you are trying to do camera movements related more to music than to something which was conventionally useful. He moved the camera not to describe somebody or to show somebody on a roof but just in a way getting away. Sometimes it was too obvious, but I was fascinated by that in Delmer Daves who, as a director, I was studying very, very much and I felt at that time very related.

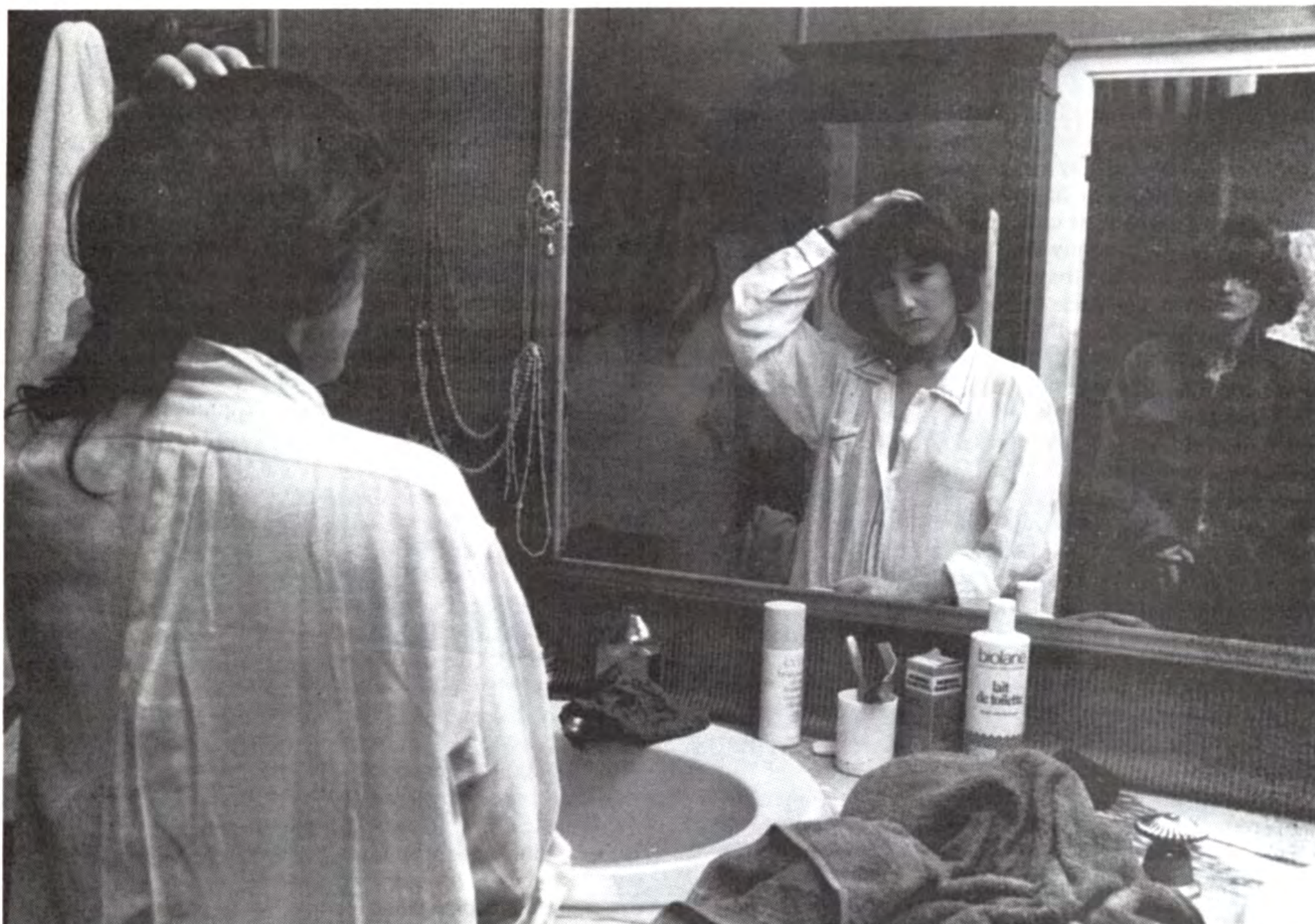
**RW:** *What I think is especially complex about your work is the precise relationship you set up between the spectator and the protagonist in the film . . . I think especially of Natalie Baye in A Week's Vacation and Francis in 'Round Midnight where there's this strong tendency towards identification but at the same time we are distanced. So that we're . . .*

**BT:** Don't you think it's added to by the fact that a lot of those people are dealing with communication and art and they are asking themselves the same questions the audience are asking? In the case of *'Round Midnight*, that was for me the only way I could see not to do an imitation of an American film, to get back to my roots and my culture and at the same time to do an impressionistic telling of the story and at a certain moment to break away from that identification for the audience, at another to get it back because that was part of the theme. It's a way, when you deal with films which look for emotion more than plot twist, of changing identification for the audience. I mean you can identify with one character and a certain moment change that, change the point of view, which I think is the only way to make that kind of film. It's why I was always angry with people who thought that I was identifying only with the painter in *Sunday in the Country*. It's impossible to do that kind of film without identifying at one point or the other with every character. I mean, the old painter, but his daughter too. The people who said that I did the film to apologize about myself, of course, they are crazy. They proved that they have absolutely no creative . . .

**RW:** *I've never heard that.*

**BT:** It's the people of *Libération* which I'm having a big fight with, it's proved that they have no creative things in them, and that they don't know that you don't do a film, you don't spend one year and a half of your life to say something that you could say in an article, which would take five hours. You don't do a film like that unless you are with the characters. I remember reading something from Peter Brook who said about Shakespeare, that what was great with Shakespeare was making his relationship with the audience. And when somebody was speaking in Shakespeare you had an impression that for Shakespeare he was right. Whatever the character was, he was right and that was a way of changing suddenly, I mean changing sides, I mean giving and breaking the identification with one character. And I think it's important, especially in certain films,





*Une Semaine de Vacances*: Laurence and her friend.

like *A Week's Vacation*, when you are dealing with communication. I mean the theme in the film is the same as the relationship between the film and the audience. So if you don't break it, if you don't give a different angle at one point you put yourself in a very comfortable position. You begin doing the opposite of what you are trying to do. You begin dictating to the audience a point of view in a film where you are pretending to explore different points of view. It's what happens with a lot of films which pretend to be against racism, etc. They end up by saying in the direction the opposite thing from what they are trying to say.

**RW:** *I think this is probably why I often think of Ozu in watching your films, especially A Week's Vacation, although your style seems so different from his. He never moves the camera, you move the camera all the time.*

**BT:** But it's funny because in Japan a lot of people reacted to *Sunday in the Country* and *'Round Midnight* by saying 'It's like Ozu.' A lot of people, I mean journalists, writers, poets. And I said exactly the same thing: I move the cameras to a point where the key grip in *Sunday in the Country*, a wonderful man, put one day on the call sheet, because he was so tired of moving the dolly (we're pushing a lot of jokes every day on the call sheet, crazy jokes and funny things)—he said, Ozu is a great director too, and I answered back, 'Ozu didn't need any grip.'

**RW:** *I think it's a matter of at the same time respecting the characters and respecting the audience.*

**BT:** Yes, yes.

**RW:** *You and Ozu don't keep telling the audience what they're to think of the characters.*

**BT:** Exactly.

**RW:** *They're left to decide.*

**BT:** It's my reaction against all those films where because of the editing, because of the way the story is told, you dictate things to the audience, I mean those TV films where you really, you really sell the audience violence as if, I mean, you were selling orange juice or razor blades. I don't see any difference in *Rambo* and a lot of films now, I mean where they are selling violence exactly as they're selling razor blades on the commercial TV.

**RW:** *They are merely commodities.*

**BT:** Yes, yes.

**RICHARD LIPPE:** *I've always found the ending of A Week's Vacation somewhat enigmatic as to what has happened to the Natalie Baye character that has made her seem more serene in the last sequence when she's with her friend. I mean particularly the comment about the dress that she's wearing which was picked out or bought by her lover and I mean there's that kind of change over, her friend now is in a disturbed position but it seems somewhat cryptic as to what has happened to her.*

**RW:** *Is it a maternity dress? Somebody suggested that it was.*

**BT:** Maybe, maybe. I wanted to leave it open. What I know is the ending changed. The ending of four films I did, changed on the sets. It was not the ending which was written. *A Week's Vacation* was more desperate. And then when I was editing, and when I saw a rough cut, I realized there was much more love and warmth between Laurence and her lover than one had expected, and there was something



more, even then. I called Colo and I said, 'Come to Lyons, we have to rewrite the last scene between them,' and we wrote the day before the scene about the dress and then watching television, that fight, and where he says, 'I bought you a dress.' That became more a love scene. After that I talked to a lot of teachers and they said, 'You know, we have a lot of doubts, we have a lot of fears, but there is a moment where what else can we do? We have to fight, we have to.' So for somebody like Natalie Baye, she cannot do any other job. The fact that her friend leaves her and cannot fight anymore because she has the possibility, because she is richer, because she has—I've seen that very often in some teachers. People from poor backgrounds were much braver, much, because they have no alternative, and I felt that suddenly that was the key to the ending, that was that, let's say, Laurence knew the word of Thoreau, that quiet despair, quiet, at the same time with a kind of serenity she had. She has to face it. That will be her job. She will do it and she will be sick and she will be full of doubts but then maybe she has overcome the period of big, big doubts. She's ready to start again and it will be as difficult but she has to do it and I like the character who goes from A to B. In most films you see people going from A to Z, and I like people who take a small step. Then we added shots which were not in the script, like the shot of the little girl on the bench. All of that was added after that, and the voice. So it's bitter-sweet but I like what Colo had written about old age, the difference in people, I mean I love that dialogue and I wanted to have a completely different—I don't know why—completely different atmosphere in the shot, in the light. I wanted a softer look. I wanted to have sun. I mean something I ask, I still cannot tell why but I wanted all of that in that moment of quietness before the work. It seems to me that it fits the music, that it fits the mood, to end up very, very slowly by somebody very quiet. I like that and it's true that you *can* think that she's maybe going to have a child, you *can* think that. You can think that the fact that she overcame a period of doubts would make her stronger but it still does not say she won everything. I wanted to leave the audience to end the film. And it's true that in the next film again the ending changed. The ending of *Sunday in the Country* was created on the set completely. The last scene with the painting, I did it. Suddenly I had the idea the day before, I asked and we shot it. It was not in the script, I mean people looking at a blank canvas.

**RL:** *It's a wonderful ending.*

**BT:** And the ending of *'Round Midnight* was not completely as written. The last line spoken by Dexter, I got the idea when I was shooting in New York and talking to Dexter, recording. I wanted to make him talk and use his voice several times in the movie. I asked a question, 'What about Dale Turner?' and he looked at me and he said, 'Maybe a street called Dale Turner.' I said, okay, I will cut my question and that is the end of the movie. And that was not planned. And too, which also was not planned, the idea of the little girl saying, 'I'm going out,' and getting up, walking to her father and kissing him. That's something I added on the set. I don't know why, especially in the last four films, the ending has been completely changed each time on the set. It's maybe because I feel more free and I understand quickly how a film is changing during the making, I mean during the direction.

**RW:** *Especially A Week's Vacation and 'Round Midnight give the impression of films that have somehow grown, I mean rather than films that were completely scripted: films that*

*grew while they were being made, rather in the manner of Renoir.*

**BT:** The biggest compliment I had on *'Round Midnight* was during shooting by one of the jazz musicians, Wayne Shorter. He said, 'You know, you are doing this film exactly as we make our music, by listening all the time the same way we are listening to the notes, taking, grabbing something, taking it, using it.' It's true that all the time I was aware, was trying. I was having dinner with Billy Higgins and he was talking about Dexter and he said, 'This thing which is in Dexter is he's afraid, it's why he did not record for the last two or three years, he was afraid of not having anything more to give'; and that line moved me and I put it in Dexter's mouth. I put it in the script and I gave it to Dexter. I heard Wayne Shorter, he was a film buff and he was talking about a lot of movie scenes and so I said, 'Okay, we're shooting tomorrow, Wayne, and you will tell what you just told me, about *The Red Shoes*,' because I think it's funny that a black musician is suddenly imitating Anton Walbrook and that's a tribute to Michael Powell, whom I admire, and it's something which I think I've never seen in a movie because you would think that he would tell a story about black actors. In fact Wayne knew mostly about people like Sidney Greenstreet or Walter Brennan and we did the film like that, adding things. Dexter, of course, brought a lot, always opening the film to suggestions and that's, anyway, the way I work all the time with the actors, because I would say that for me one of the greatest talents for a director which is something which is very rarely developed is to create around him the need for the persons who are working with him to surprise him, to astonish him, getting the unexpected from the cameraman to any actor and if you can create that spirit which people like Renoir created, then you are always exploring. Nothing is ever set. Everything is always fresh, new, and people are giving you unexpected things and they reach things which go deeper than what is written, and fresher sometimes.

**FJ:** *I think one of the things I appreciate about your films is that you capture this open-ended quality but you still use realist narrative conventions, so you maintain that relationship with the audience without compromising this open-ended and fluid form.*

**BT:** I've always liked storytelling. I like that in other films. I'm interested in attempts to create other forms, but I don't see why we should drop storytelling because a few people say that storytelling is past. It's crazy. I've always hated, always fought against exclusion, and people say, 'This thing is not right and this thing is.' At the moment, when people say that storytelling is not fashionable anymore, it's a moment generally where the biggest successes, critical and public, are films which completely rely on the story's writer. What amuses me too, very often you have in the same newspaper critics who attack certain new film-makers, because they use that old form of storytelling which is bad, bourgeois, conventional, and at the same time, next page, there is a TV column and they speak about a film by Duviol or Decoin, 'This was a completely underrated masterpiece, great screenplay by Aurenche and Bost, superbly crafted.' That's great. So I would like to know at what year exactly storytelling became outlawed.

**FJ:** 1969.

OPPOSITE—*'Round Midnight*: Martin Scorsese, François Cluzet, Dexter Gordon (above). *'Round midnight* (below).









LEFT—Without self-pity: Romy Schneider in *Death Watch*. RIGHT—Natalie Baye in *Une Semaine de Vacances* (*A Week's Vacation*).

**BT:** I mean it's surprising. I'm completely against people who refuse to have anything but storytelling and I think there have been some items which are very, very important and very moving. It's exactly like literature. You can have Jim Thompson, Aragon, Raymond Queneau and René Char. It's like jazz, everything can co-exist at the same time and what is good, what is enjoyable, is to see the moment when the different forms interpenetrate, how the storytelling of certain directors whom I respect and admire is full of dissonance, but as it's not advertised, people don't say, 'Look at that moment, it's a moment where the story is broken, we are destroying the construction.' People do not notice and I think time will judge that. It already has: a lot of films which were judged old-fashioned 20 years ago are now considered classics. That doesn't prevent me from admiring very, very much certain scenes from Godard or other directors, and I don't see, again, why we should not be part of the same research. I don't see why there should not be cinema of research and the cinema which is that of convention.

**FJ:** Even Godard comes back to narrative in his last few films.

**BT:** But it is true that some people think that because they are making some research, they are finding things. But they have to prove it. Picasso was right: the people who find are more interesting than the people who search.

**RL:** Talking about Godard, I was wondering, was *Spoiled Children* influenced by *Tout Va Bien*, because it's a somewhat parallel love story juxtaposed with the political issues

...

**BT:** No. I think the great influence, and I missed, was Dos Passos, the building of some novels. I mean cutting between different types of stories and going on, but I did not succeed, again because I was too close to that story which was a story which I had lived, I mean the tenancy and I think I missed, I missed. I didn't have that distance that I had in *A Week's Vacation* which allowed me to be wider, to take an angle which was more interesting. And I like the writing, certain things done by Christine Pascal but had some prob-

lem with her in acting because she wanted too much to be angry. I wanted her to be more relaxed, more charming, thinking that it would be as strong, I mean the statement, and she wanted to get the statement first. I lost a little bit. I still think that there's two scenes in which she is great in the movie and I still think that the film is saying some interesting things about the French society, that especially now I just sold the film to television and I would like it seen on television because we are saying exactly things which the new government is doing. I mean it's giving everything to the landlord. It's giving everything, everything. It's happening now, they are destroying the law which prevented the landlord from raising the rent in certain houses in Paris. They are stopping the rights of the tenants. They are giving everything back to the landlord. I would like to see what would be the reaction of a certain line because I was very much accused of doing a propaganda film at that time, which made me always angry because that's something which we have in France, a fear of telling a certain thing because it's not artistic enough, when the Italians have not that fear. I mean they are ready to name, they are naming everybody, when in France we are ashamed because we say, 'My God, it's too expressive,' and in France when you are expressive this is the worst crime and already Victor Hugo was fighting against that when he said that in France a good writer has to be very well brought up, not make too much noise and he must be *sober*. And he says, *sober*, it's a strange quality for a writer. It should be more the quality for a maid, for a valet or a domestic. He said, to the *sober* writer correspond the people who vote in the accepted direction, for law and order, and there is a wonderful page in *William Shakespeare* about that, which is a terrific, terrific page, where he says a lot of things about good taste, how good taste can be a good disguise for reactionary things, statements, and Hugo who I think is the most astonishing and sometimes underrated writer, his political work is incredible, was right in the battle. But anyway I still think that I missed the film. I liked the music in *Spoiled Children* which was written by Philippe Sarde, based on an 18th century type of music, but I missed.



**RW:** I'm very intrigued by one small detail in *Des Enfants Gâtés* which is the moment when Christine Pascal criticizes *Death Watch* a year before you made it. But I think it's a valid criticism. I didn't like the ending very much either. I think that's what she says, isn't it, that she liked the film but she didn't like the ending?

**BT:** Yes. I think *Death Watch* made more problems for me, because I got lost. I think I should have been more simple. That was my first film in English and I got caught by the style of David Raphael who is a marvellous writer but I think I wanted to say too many things and I got a little lost. I should have taken out some plot twists, which were too complicated and especially in the first third and at the end too. As for the twist at the end, I feel ashamed about it, that she was not dying. I could have done the film absolutely without that and it would have been better.<sup>3</sup> But I still like from the second third nearly to the end where it went over to Max von Sydow, because I like the photography, and the music of Antoine Duhamel and I like what's happening between Romy Schneider and Harvey Keitel. And I like Harvey in it. I think it is one of his best parts and it's the only time where his director made him play relaxed, smiling and with charm. What he was trying to establish made the film very difficult for me to shoot: the relationship between the director and what he is shooting, and the *morality* of direction, and I had many, many problems with that because I wanted to be moral in my direction and not to do what I'm supposed to do, to criticize. So it's why I did the film in long takes trying never to manipulate the characters. But I like the integration of the landscape with the characters. And the idea that a science-fiction film is made in 19th century buildings, I think for me it's a stimulating idea and I was pleased with the film. Joseph Losey loved the film and he immediately hired David Raphael after that to write what was a very, very good screenplay, which it's a pity that Losey never filmed, called *Silence*, based on the book by James Kenaway, taking place in Chicago. A wonderful screenplay which was then sabotaged by a horrible producer. He refused to do it with Losey and that was a pity because that would have been a great, great film, with Losey coming back to America, set in Chicago about the racial problem. But, David, I like his style, I liked certain things in the dialogue and still like them. There is a line which I

loved. Romy says to Harry Dean Stanton, when she speaks about the television, 'Everything is of interest and nothing matters,' which I think is a wonderful line, and a great description of not only television but part of the cinema now. Everything is of interest and nothing matters. And I loved working with Romy and Harry Dean Stanton which was his first part, out of cowboy roles, a long time before *Paris, Texas*. But I think somewhere, there are certain shots, certain moments which I'm very, very, very proud of. I mean when she escapes in that Steadicam shot . . .

**RW:** Oh, that's astonishing.

**BT:** . . . and the sets of Tony Pratt were brilliant because it's a whole set, that market. Everybody thought, even in Glasgow, that it was a real flea market.

**RW:** I thought it was.

**BT:** No, it's a whole set and I think it's great, great art direction work, I mean very, very, very good and I think, with *A Week's Vacation* it's the best photography of Peter William Blaine. I think he got things which were incredible. In the music at the end something very funny happened—I like the story told by Max von Sydow—a lot of people called me after the release of the film, even from big record shops, saying, Robert DeBouriac, did he exist, because we have had five or six people asking for a score. So it caught on, and it's a beautiful cantata written by Antoine Duhamel. Finally, Romy Schneider was marvellous. Romy and I discussed the film, and she sent me a letter: 'I will be your Catherine. Without self-pity.'

## FOOTNOTES

1. Truffaut's seminal article, "On a Certain Tendency in French Cinema," one of the origins of what we now call Auteur Theory, in which he attacked the literary emphasis of the French '*Cinéma de qualité*,' taking the screenplays of Aurenche and Bost as typifying its respectable academicism, is perhaps most readily accessible in translation in *Movies and Methods* (ed. Bill Nichols, University of California Press, 1976).
2. A group of critics who championed a handful of Hollywood directors including Losey, Preminger, Lang and Walsh on the strength of their fidelity to 'truth' and the 'real,' and who controlled the programming of the MacMahon cinema in Paris.
3. Tavernier was able to cut this 'plot twist' for the North American release.

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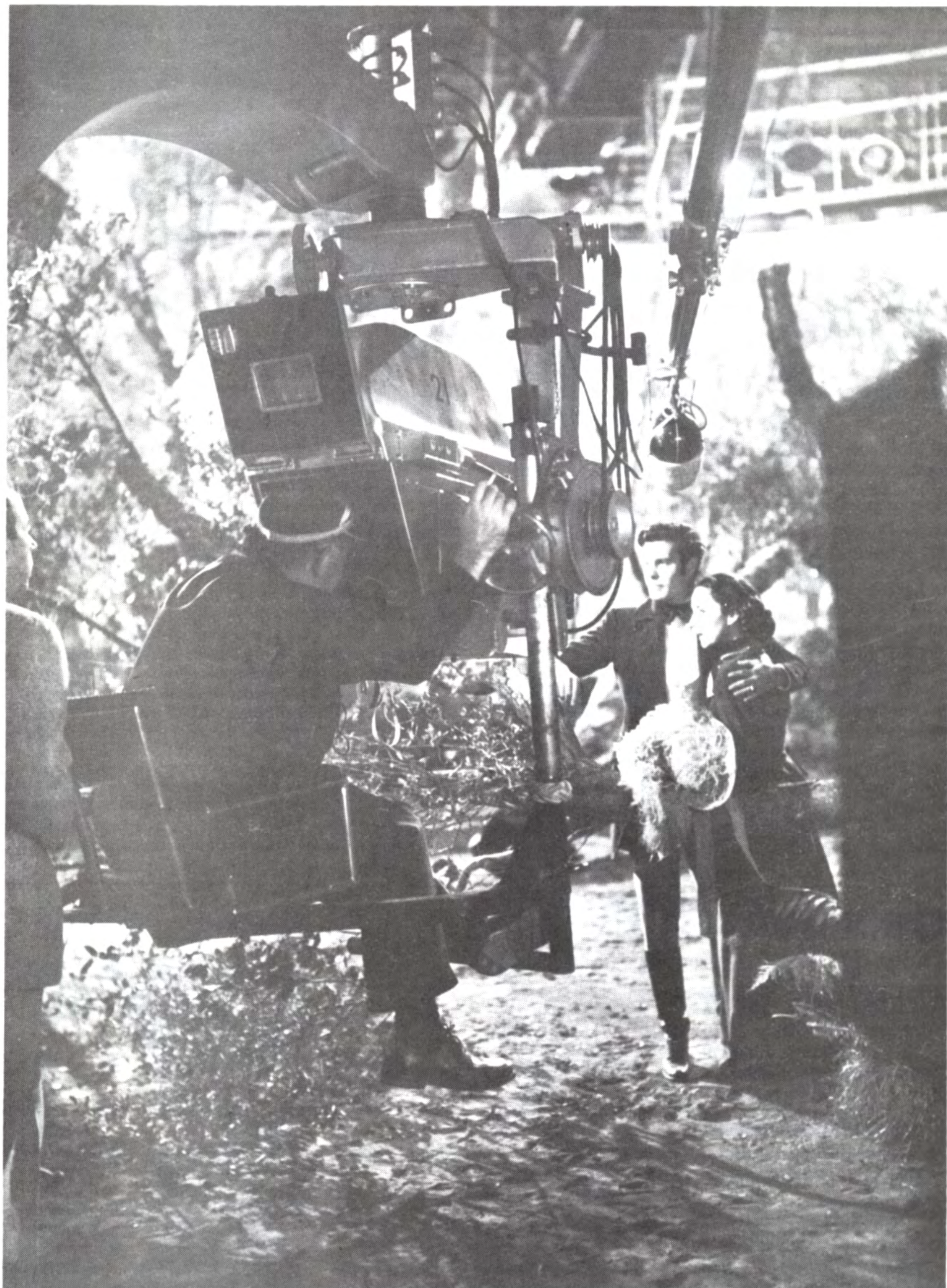
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*Madame Bovary*: Minnelli (extreme left) directs Louis Jourdan and Jennifer Jones.



# Minnelli's *Madame Bovary*

by Robin Wood

**I**F MINNELLI WAS AMONG THE MOST NEGLECTED and misrecognized of the major Hollywood directors, *Madame Bovary* is perhaps the most neglected and misrecognized of his major works. Even Stephen Harvey, a critic with a long-standing commitment to Minnelli's films, in an obituary in *Film Comment* (October 1986) explicitly dedicated to the setting right of misconceptions, comes up with this extraordinary pronouncement: "Minnelli indicted Emma as an overweening provincial doomed never to find the beauty she sought—primarily because she had such ghastly taste." The remark (itself in 'such ghastly taste' for anyone open to the film's emotional impact) seems to tell us more about Harvey (or the milieu within which he operates) than about Minnelli. Whatever else, his *Madame Bovary* is not the work of a trivializing snob: as Emma dies of arsenic poisoning we are not invited to reflect that she got what she deserved for not possessing a more sophisticated view of interior decoration.

The only attempt in English that I know of to examine and assess the film in any detail is the chapter devoted to it in George Bluestone's *Novels into Film*, which, as one of the most grotesquely misguided and misconceived pieces of writing ever perpetrated by an evidently serious and intelligent critic, provides a useful starting-point. Bluestone's entire assault on Minnelli's film collapses in ruins as soon as its underlying assumption is spelt out—which he very considerately does for us: "In brief, the implication is that the film-maker who would tell Emma's story must find visual equivalents for Flaubert's language. . . ." In fact, it is not really accurate to say that Bluestone examines the film in detail: its detail remains inaccessible to him, because he totally ignores all the major factors that create it. He discusses the film in only one context, that of Flaubert's novel, a completely ahistorical approach that removes it cleanly from the actual context (national, social, industrial, temporal) within which it was produced. Bluestone's conception of the possible range of relationships between film and source is hopelessly narrow; to inform us that Minnelli (who has at least been widely recognized, to the point of cliché, as one of the American cinema's most fully formed and masterly stylists) "must" find visual equivalents

for Flaubert's language strikes one as a singular piece of effrontery.

To return the film from Bluestone's ahistorical vacuum to its material context, I want to discuss it in relation to four major determining factors all of which he ignores, but on the complex interaction of which its richness of signification depends: auteur, star, and period of production.

1. **Auteur.** Bluestone does manage (twice) to refer to "Vincent (sic) Minnelli" as the director of the film, but he offers no account of Minnelli as an artist and shows no awareness of any of his other films. It would be more profitable to discuss *Madame Bovary* in relation to *The Pirate* (made the year before), with which it has a great deal in common thematically and stylistically, than in relation to Flaubert.

2. **Star.** Bluestone does not find it necessary even to mention that Emma is played by Jennifer Jones, despite the fact that on one level *Madame Bovary* is quite plainly a star 'vehicle,' with Jones' image/screen persona contributing significantly to its tone and meaning. It would be more profitable to discuss it in relation to *Duel in the Sun* and *Ruby Gentry* than in relation to Flaubert.

3. **Genre and Period.** Bluestone also neglects to acknowledge (let alone discuss) the genre to which Minnelli's film (for all its prestigious literary derivation) patently belongs, and of which it is among the supreme examples: the Hollywood melodrama, and more specifically its subdivision the 'woman's picture.' Furthermore, the film belongs to a particular (and particularly important) phase of the genre's evolution: the period following the end of World War II. It would be more profitable to discuss it in relation to *All That Heaven Allows*, *The Reckless Moment* and *Beyond the Forest* than in relation to Flaubert.

Bluestone might object that he never proposed to discuss any of these issues: his professed concern is purely with the ways in which novels have been adapted. This scarcely exempts him, I think, from the responsibility of passing judgement on a film whose nature he never even attempts to define. In any case his underlying premise is, to say the least, dubious. An attempt to 'translate' a great author's creativity into another medium almost invariably kills it; the only sound criterion is the degree to which the film-maker has been able to



make the material his own, the medium for his *own* creativity (which may be, and in the case of Minnelli/Flaubert is, quite antipathetic to that of the writer).

**B**LUESTONE'S INDIGNANT STARTING-POINT for the proliferation of his objections is the film's foregrounding of Flaubert/James Mason in its prologue and epilogue (and throughout, in Mason's off-screen narration), his point being that Flaubert regarded authorial invisibility as a supreme value in the creation of fiction. What Bluestone misses is the immediate practical function of the framework: not to defend the novel against charges of immorality in 1856, but to safeguard the film against censorship in 1949 (its very production had been threatened by the Hays Office). However, by far the most important difference between novel and film lies in the author's (and reader's) relationship to the central figure: Flaubert's celebrated detachment (described more brutally by D.H. Lawrence: "He stood off from life as from a leprosy") is replaced by Minnelli's passionate commitment to and identification with his (and Jennifer Jones') Emma Bovary; the Flaubertian assumption of clinical objectivity (which in practice becomes often indistinguishable from contempt) gives way to an all-pervasive, precariously controlled hysteria.

It is the principle of hysteria that draws together here, in a magnificent unity, Minnelli, Jones and the woman-centred melodrama. Susan Morrison wrote about 'the hysterical text' in the last issue of *CineAction!*, in relation to *New York, New York* and *Written on the Wind*; I want to argue that *Madame Bovary* is one of Hollywood's supreme expressions of that phenomenon. First, perhaps, it is necessary to defend hysteria as a valid reaction to certain social conditions ("Don't be so hysterical" is always understood as a reprimand, and 'hysterical' movies are generally condemned as such by reviewers anxious to establish their own superior poise). Popularly it has always been, and in general still is, associated with women, as a particularly 'feminine' disorder, and, while Morrison (following Freud) correctly points out that women do not have a monopoly on it, its popular attribution to women within patriarchal cultures is not without relevance. Broadly speaking, hysteria (I use the term more in its wider, popular sense than in the strict psychoanalytic one, though the two are obviously connected) can be seen as a response to the frustration of the desire for power—the power, at least, to make one's own decisions, control one's own destiny, achieve a measure of personal autonomy, all of which under a capitalist economy will be inevitably involved with power over money, and under a patriarchal economy with power over sexuality: the twin mainsprings of the woman's melodrama.

The tendency to hysteria, then, is logically inherent in the basic materials of the genre. It may of course be treated or inflected very differently by different film-makers: Preminger's *Angel Face*, for example, might stand as the great extreme exemplar of the rigorously non-hysterical presentation of the ultimate in hysterical subject-matter (compare Preminger's devastatingly poker-faced treatment of the final catastrophe, filmed in 'objective' long-shot, with the climactic car-rides of *The Bad and the Beautiful* and *Two Weeks in Another Town*). Hysteria is a major component of both Minnelli's directorial personality and Jones' screen persona. Indeed, in the case of Jones it is the one consistent factor that connects the disparate roles she has played, the opposite poles of the image (innocence/sensuality), from Saint Bernadette to Pearl (*Duel in the Sun*) and Ruby Gentry. (Even her ingénue in *Since You Went Away* is remembered primarily for the big hysterical scene that follows the revelation that Robert Walker has been killed in

action). The suppressed 'religious' hysteria of her Bernadette is easily (given the psychoanalytic reading of religious ecstasy as sublimated eroticism) transformed into the directly erotic hysteria of Pearl, Emma and Ruby.

Hysteria is also a central defining principle of Minnelli's work, linking the melodrama and the musicals (too often treated as distinct expressions of his artistic personality). I should make clear that I am not subscribing here to any Romantic notion of art as direct and unmediated self-expression—i.e. Minnelli was feeling pretty hysterical one day so he shot the ball scene from *Madame Bovary*. Neither, however, do I subscribe to current absurd notions of the artist's non-existence: the opposition developed within contemporary film theory between 'personal expression' and the deployment of signifiers, as mutually exclusive models of how works of art come into being, seems to me stupid and pernicious. Minnelli understood hysteria, emotionally and intellectually, as a response to feelings of powerlessness and entrapment, and he was able to dramatize it (without ever abandoning artistic/intellectual control) in many of his finest films. That is why he is able so often to identify with hysterical female protagonists: Judy Garland in *The Pirate*, Shirley Maclaine in *Some Came Running*, Jennifer Jones in *Madame Bovary*. One manifestation of this hysteria was noted long ago in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, I think by Jean Domarchi, who identified 'the destruction of décor' as a recurrent motif in Minnelli's films, cutting across all the genres in which he worked. One thinks of Tootie's assault, in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, on the snow-people (a family group, the incident immediately answered by Mr. Smith's decision to restore and reinforce family unity by staying in St. Louis "until we rot"); the systematic destruction of the mobile home in *The Long, Long Trailer*; Manuela's attack, in *The Pirate*, on Serafin, necessitating the destruction of Don Pedro's parlour; the climactic smashing of the windows at the height of the ball scene in *Madame Bovary*; the demolition of the drapes in *The Cobweb*. In all these cases the décor that is destroyed embodies an ideological (rather than merely physical) entrapment or constraint. The perfect example is that from *The Pirate*: Manuela's hysteria is a reaction against both the false macho posturings of Serafin (insofar as the objects are flung at him) and the possibility of entrapment in bourgeois marriage (as the décor actually belongs to Don Pedro, Manuela's prospective husband).

Three addenda: 1. I do not want to suggest that the expression of hysteria in Minnelli is restricted to 'the destruction of décor,' which is merely a convenient, if potentially reductive, formula. There are also, for instance, the wild car-rides of *The Bad and the Beautiful* and *Two Weeks in Another Town*, the frenzied climaxes of *Some Came Running* and *Home from the Hill*, and various musical numbers (so different from their counterparts in the MGM Kelly/Donen musicals of the same period): Astaire's Surrealist dream in *Yolanda and the Thief*, Garland's fantasy of power and castration in *The Pirate* (where she is identified with both the mule and her 'ideal ego' Serafin), Oscar Levant's power-and-pianism fantasy in *An American in Paris*. 2. As certain of these examples already indicate, neither do I wish to suggest that hysteria in Minnelli is restricted to female characters: see, for instance, Kirk Douglas in all his Minnelli movies but especially *Lust for Life*, Robert Taylor in *Undercurrent*, George Hamilton in *Home from the Hill*. 3. Nonetheless, the final and ultimate expres-

OPPOSITE—Male hysteria: Lana Turner and Kirk Douglas in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (above). *Madame Bovary*: Jennifer Jones as Emma (below left). *Objet d'Art* in the kitchen: Jennifer Jones and Van Heflin (below right).







sion of hysteria in Minnelli's work takes female form: Ingrid Bergman in *A Matter of Time*, Minnelli's last and perhaps most intensely personal film, whose mutilation is among the great Hollywood tragedies (in this age of restorations, is no one interested in reconstructing Minnelli's original version before it is too late?).

*Madame Bovary* and *The Pirate* belong together as companion-pieces, complementary 'hysterical texts' within radically different genres, their differences determined by generic potentialities—in each case potentialities which Minnelli drives to their extremes. Both films are centred on a young woman motivated by unrealistic and unfulfillable romantic aspirations (Manuela's yearning to be carried off by a storybook pirate closely corresponds to Emma's self-identification with the heroines of romantic literature). In both cases the romantic aspirations are viewed ambivalently: on the one hand they are seen as misguided, incapable of realization, and potentially self-destructive; on the other they represent the only escape available within the heroine's environment from its economic and ideological constrictions—especially, the suffocation, for the woman, of a traditional bourgeois marriage. Further, both films dramatize the frustrated woman's tendency to seek identity (in herself or vicariously) with the male position, its power and freedom: hence Manuela's identification, in the 'pirate' fantasy, with her vision of Mack the Black as ideal ego; and Emma, denied any recognition as autonomous being within her own life, longs for a son who, as male, will inherit the power and freedom she lacks. Richard Lippe, in an article on *A Matter of Time* in *CineAction! 1*, emphasized the importance within Minnelli's work generally of notions of creativity and performance, as valid and realizable means of self-fulfilment, of transcending social/ideological entrapment; Emma's tragedy is that her essentially creative aspirations can find no form worthy of them, within her social environment but also within the generic environment. Hence the diametrically opposed progress of the two films. The musical genre can enable *The Pirate's* 'utopian' happy ending: Serafin and Manuela are able to cast off (respectively) macho presumption and romantic fantasy; the climactic number ("Be a Clown") is a celebration both of the collapse of gender-difference in androgyny and of the creativity that makes such a resolution possible by allowing the couple to move outside the social norms as performers. Within the melodrama, the 'happy ending' can seldom be more than what Sirk called an 'emergency exit,' more or less derisory as a proposed resolution of the conflicts (*Under Capricorn* provides one of the rare significant exceptions). In *Madame Bovary* Minnelli (and here we may acknowledge a little help from Flaubert, the alibi of 'great literature' facilitating the avoidance of emergency exits) drove the implications of the genre to their logical conclusion in Emma's final act of tragic desperation.

The traditional account of the evolution of the melodrama in the late '40s connects it to the situation of women after the 2nd World War: during the war they had been encouraged to come out of the home and take the place of the absent men in the work force, hence discovering for the first time a measure of autonomy, earning money in their own right, no longer dependent upon the weekly generosity of their husbands; they also began to discover the potentialities of women's solidarity. When the war ended and the surviving men returned, the ideological pressure was reversed and every effort was made to convince them that their correct place, and the one they had really always wanted (it was, after all, the 'natural' one), was back in the home as housewives and mothers. The films can be read as in part a response to the resulting tensions, so long as

we bear in mind that there is no clear break in the genre's thematic, merely an exacerbation of problems that were always there and which the melodrama had consistently addressed. What needs firmly to be refuted is the simple-minded notion that the films are part of a propagandistic patriarchal-capitalist conspiracy, solely conceived to teach female spectators that if they don't behave and accept their traditional role they will be ruthlessly punished. It is certainly crucial that the films were made primarily for a female audience (one might again contrast Flaubert's novel, the reader of which is clearly constructed, in his position of superiority, as male), but it seems extremely doubtful that women used to be so stupid as to pay their pocket-money to sit through film after film in order masochistically, stoically or complacently to identify with the heroine's punishment at the end; or that film-makers like Minnelli, Ophuls and Vidor were so stupid as to think they were so stupid. In order to reach their intended audience—in order, that is, to achieve commercial success, a consideration that, where there is conflict, can often overrule notions of the ideologically desirable within the Hollywood business world—it was necessary for the films to dramatize the existing societal tensions as intelligently and forcefully as possible. It is further obvious that the great female stars functioned as identification figures, and they all, in a wide variety of ways, embodied types of transgressiveness. The films show that punishment for transgression is inevitable within the existing social conditions; but, by the time the punishment is reached, the social conditions have been effectively discredited, so that the punishment is registered as unjust, excessive or monstrous. My eldest sister, herself a strong and assertive woman who spent most of the 2nd World War (in England) in the women's branch of the armed services, identified totally with Bette Davis throughout (and prior to) this period, never missing a Davis film. It is clear to me that what she identified with was Davis' strength and habitual transgressiveness, even (perhaps especially) in films like *The Letter* where the character was explicitly designated 'wicked'; the punishment was a minor, if inevitable, annoyance. Similarly, we cannot even begin to appreciate *Madame Bovary* unless we accept and share Minnelli's identification with Jennifer Jones. From a conventional moral standpoint Emma's behaviour is selfish and immoral (the conventional moral standpoint being by definition patriarchal); from any moral standpoint it is harmful to others and ultimately self-destructive. But the basis of identification is the principle of hysteria—the instinctive response to powerlessness and the stifling of creativity—that gives rise to and accounts for that behaviour. Emma cannot be blamed for breaking the rules of patriarchal capitalist society: she had no say in the making of them. It is striking that only one character in the film is permitted a speech morally denouncing Emma: the felicitously named Monsieur L'Heureux, the hypocrite moneylender, the film's ultimate monster and spokesperson for capitalism, who denounces Emma from the illustrious position of a man "in the business of making money—a recognized, honourable profession."

The principle of hysteria is embedded in the film's very structure, a structure of exceptional rigour and logic. Its midpoint and conclusion marked by Emma's two suicide attempts, it is built consistently on her efforts to realize her romantic aspirations in concrete forms, every attempt followed by a corresponding frustration, every frustration motivating in its turn a new attempt at self-realization, producing a 'weave' of aspiration/frustration that develops inexorably, accumulating ever-increasing intensity, towards the two 'suicidal' climaxes. The pattern is precise and consistent enough to be charted:



## MADAME BOVARY: Structure

Aspiration	Frustration
Romantic fantasies	Farmhouse
<b>S1</b>	
Charles M1	'Not exciting'
Wedding	Vulgarity H1
Yonville	Drab house
Interior decoration	Start of credit notes M2
Salon M3	Marquis' laughter H2
Desire for son (who will have the power Emma lacks)	Birth of daughter
Invitation M4	
Ball M5	Charles drunkenness H3
A1: Léon: seduction	Madame Dupuis' intervention H4
A2: Rodolphe	Charles' public speech
Hippolyte's foot	Charles' failure to perform the operation H5
A2: consummation	Charles on stairs, child's alienation M6 H6
A2: elopement (i)	L'Heureux—Rodolphe's name required H7
elopement (ii)	Rodolphe's betrayal H8
<b>S2</b>	
Suicide 1	
Opera in Rouen	The aging tenor H9
A1: assignation	Squalid room H10 M7
<b>S3</b>	
A1: consummation	Maid's hostility, child's rejection, bills H11
(To L'Heureux for money	power of attorney)
A1: resumption (gondola bed)	Tacky decor
Léon: papers	Employer's rejection HL1
A1: continuation	L'Heureux spying H12
(L'Heureux to Charles—interrupted	notes sold to Guillaumin)
To Guillaumin (money)	Attempted assault H13
<b>S4</b>	
To Léon (money)	Léon a clerk HL2 Home M8
(A1 concluded)	
To Rodolphe (money)	Rodolphe's rejection H14
(A2 concluded)	
Suicide 2	
<b>Key:</b> S: Storm H: Humiliation HL: Humiliation of Léon M: Mirror A: Adultery	

It remains to suggest something of the film's richness of connotation. Rather than attempt an exhaustive analysis, I shall isolate a series of recurring motifs, some (but not all) of which are notated above on the chart; some are specific to the film, others belong more generally to the genre but are developed and orchestrated by Minnelli with particular system and intelligence.

1. **Storms:** clearly a staple of the 'hysterical text,' externalizing the characters' inner tumult (compare the leaves blowing into the house at the beginning and end of *Written on the Wind*, or the storms that, in Hitchcock's great melodrama, mark both the initiation of Marnie's trauma and her eventual recall). In *Madame Bovary* Minnelli uses storms to connect Emma's two suicide attempts, and to link both to her first meeting with Charles—her initial illusion of escape which leads to the subsequent entrapments of which her life consists.

2. **Emma's dresses.** The motif is established from the outset in the incongruously extravagant dress in which Emma presents herself to Charles in her father's farmhouse kitchen. Emma's dresses—always *too much*, too grandiose, often simply too large for their environment, emphasizing the way the décor hems her in—become the expression of her frustrated creativity, epitomising not only her drive to construct herself as glamorous object, as work of art, but her desire to burst the bounds of her social context.

3. **Birds.** Emma's ball-dress is decorated with birds in flight, which appear to have just taken wing. The romantic aspiration this expresses is answered in one of the scenes of ultimate humiliation, the visit to Monsieur Guillaumin to recover the credit notes, Guillaumin attempting to profit from Emma's economic subjugation by assaulting her: his parlour is full of caged birds.

4. **Italy as romantic escape.** Emma and Rodolphe are to elope to Italy; it is Rodolphe's betrayal that precipitates the first suicide attempt. The implicit aspiration is answered in the reality of Emma's affair with Léon Dupuis: in the pretentious and tacky hotel room in which they keep their assignation, the bed is in the shape of a gondola.

5. **Money.** The woman's lack of autonomous access to economic power haunts the melodrama, often peripherally, though in some of the finest examples (*Caught*, *The Reckless Moment*, *Beyond the Forest*) it becomes a central issue. Introduced near the beginning of *Madame Bovary* (interior decoration/start of credit notes—see chart), it is taken up in Monsieur L'Heureux's insistence that a man's name guarantee payment for the accoutrements of Emma's elopement with Rodolphe. In the second half of the film the motif virtually takes over. The culminations of Emma's two adulterous relationships are not the romantic fulfilment to which she aspired but the woman's desperate plea for financial help from a man who is either unable (Léon) or unwilling (Rodolphe) to respond positively. Emma is finally destroyed by men's control of the economy and women's enforced ignorance of its workings.

6. **Mirrors.** Mirror imagery recurs throughout the Hollywood melodrama and films related to it (see, for example, Hitchcock's use of mirrors at particularly 'loaded' moments of *Under Capricorn* and *The Wrong Man*, signifying respectively the construction and destruction of illusory images of wholeness). Yet, Sirk apart (and he only in *Written on the Wind* and *Imitation of Life*), no one has used mirror images as complexly and systematically, as a structuring procedure rather than as decoration, as Minnelli in *Madame Bovary*. I have not attempted in the chart to annotate all the recurrences of mirror imagery, preferring to draw attention to the eight occasions where it achieves clear structural significance. Also, it must not be reduced to a single 'symbolic' meaning: the connotations shift and change in relation to the progress of the narrative, moving from Emma's vanity through her construction of an illusory image of romantic fulfilment, to the destruction of that image and the culminating revelation of the reality to which Emma has descended. Here I single out five of the eight instances. i. Emma in the farmhouse in her enormous dress is shown as an image in a mirror, like a painting, the work of art she inspires to become. ii. It is the purchase of a mirror—with a very ornate frame, in which Emma can develop her ideal image of herself—that initiates the process of credit notes that gradually becomes decisive to Emma's downfall: as child-woman in a world where men are the adults, she is still too completely under the sway of the pleasure-principle to take heed of the material realities that will destroy her. iii. Central to Emma's development is her vision of herself at the ball, in her dress with the birds in flight, reflected in another ornate mirror, surrounded by a number of admiring young men, grouped and posed as in a painting: the illusory perfection of her ideal self-image. It is swiftly followed by the ominous building hysteria of the dance, Emma's fainting spell, the smashing of windows. iv. Waiting for her assignation with Léon in the squalid hotel in Rouen, Emma, wearing the same dress (now absurdly incongruous within the constricting décor) momentarily recaptures that ideal image; but the hotel mirror is cracked and tarnished, the fantasy cannot be sustained. v. Finally, just before her last visit to Rodolphe to beg for money, Emma sees herself as she has become, pallid, drawn, haggard, and tries desperately and unsuccessfully to recreate herself by applying makeup.

7. **Windows.** Mirror and window imagery are often associated within the melodrama (again, *Madame Bovary* apart, this is most thoroughly systematized in the films of Sirk, notably



*Written on the Wind*). The imagery of windows carries its own inherent ambiguity (entrapment/escape) and can therefore be inflected in quite different ways in the work of different filmmakers: for example, a recurrent motif in Renoir's work is the opening of windows, in Ophüls' their closing, a detail that is very suggestive in relation to the overall thematic of both directors. *Madame Bovary* explores the possible connotations very complexly. Again, I shall isolate a few key instances rather than attempt an exhaustive account. i. Emma surveying and caustically cataloguing from her upstairs window the monotonous daily routine of Yonville: she looks out from the entrapment of her home to see nothing but the entrapment of the small town. ii. The smashing of the windows at the ball. The ball scene is at once one of Minnelli's finest musical 'numbers' and a supreme enactment of the 'hysterical text.' Indeed, although the smashing of the windows is diegetically motivated (Emma begins to faint, and needs fresh air), it is more cogently *demandé* by the emotional progress of the sequence, its brilliantly orchestrated escalation into hysteria. The guiding idea is once again the collision between the pleasure principle and the reality principle: Emma's rising ecstasy is systematically intercut with Charles' increasing drunkenness, the sequence culminating in Emma's humiliation when he invades the dance floor to claim her. But the source of the hysteria lies in Emma's misrecognition of illusion (the 'ideal' mirror image) for a sustainable reality: her clinging on to the sense of an illusory romantic fulfilment becomes increasingly more desperate, the dream becoming increasingly nightmarish, precipitating the 'destruction of décor,' a décor whose longed for luxury and extravagance is but another entrapment. iii. Emma/Léon. Richard Lippe pointed out to me that the smashing of the windows at the ball is echoed in Léon's smashing his fist through a window pane in the Rouen hotel.

The connection confirms the parallel the film develops between Emma and Léon, her romantic illusions about herself echoed in his fantasy that he is a partner in the law firm in which he is in fact a mere clerk, her humiliation as a woman echoed in his as an employee, both deprived of power and self-respect, both victims of 'the system.'

Finally, the two suicides (attempted and successful, mid-point and end of the film) are linked by window imagery, worked out very precisely in terms of opposition and parallel. When Emma attempts to throw herself from the window after Rodolphe's betrayal, the camera views the action from outside, static; Emma's death scene is framed by two shots looking out from the bedroom window over Yonville, the second (the acknowledgement of the moment of death) a tracking-shot moving from a medium close-up of Charles (looking, as usual, vaguely troubled by his chronic inability imaginatively to comprehend the woman he loves) to the open window and then forward, to exclude the room and frame the town beneath the nocturnal sky. The camera-movement outwards towards freedom (the only such movement in the film) can be read as evoking the birds-in-flight on Emma's ball-dress, the shot becoming from this viewpoint Minnelli's final celebration of her spirit at the moment of her final defeat. But there is nothing sentimental about this, the celebration being qualified by an equally strong irony. The use of the window and the view of the town also evokes Emma's commentary on small-town routine and tedium; what the camera-movement reveals is not the open sky but Yonville, the imprisoning and creativity-stifling environment in which other Emmas may be struggling to find expression and fulfilment amid conditions that render both unrealizable. The shot's function is as much structural as expressive: it draws together the threads of the film in a single camera-gesture. □

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# Gay Visibility: Contemporary Images

by Richard Lippe

Vito Russo on *My Beautiful Laundrette*: "At the end of a recent screening I heard a woman say to her friend, 'But I don't get it. Why were they gay?'" —'A State of Being,' *Film Comment*, April 1986.

**A**S AN ADULT GAY PERSON living in present-day Toronto, I have access to various cultural products, e.g., newspapers, magazines, books, records, that specifically address me in a variety of ways, some positive and some not so positive. Primarily, these cultural products are produced within the gay community. But, whereas the attempt to construct a feminist cinema has made considerable advances, the attempt to construct a gay cinema remains at an embryonic stage. Confronted by an overwhelmingly patriarchal/heterosexist culture, I often feel in an extremely vulnerable position when viewing mainstream films or television programmes which both allow only a very limited expression for gay voices. When I was growing up as a young gay male, I felt continuously oppressed by the negative cinematic images of gays—the comic faggot, the bitchy queen and the neurotic, self-destructive homosexual. Although the gay liberation movement and feminism have done much to counteract offensive presentations of gays and lesbians in the media, the negative image continues to remain in circulation. For instance, *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Rustler's Rhapsody* (1985) employ numerous fag jokes and *Sudden Impact* (1983) uses the image of the 'bulldike' to fashion one of its most grotesque characters. I don't want to suggest that I think the erasing of the negative image is necessarily progressive. These images express notions prevalent in our society which need to be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of the workings of the social and cultural. Additionally, I believe, it is a misconception to think that it is simply a matter of denying negative images and establishing positive images. These positive images can also become constricting to definitions of gays as individuals and,



*Desert Hearts*: The uncertain ending.

more broadly, to the impact of the gay liberation movement as a source of political intervention. Perhaps, what needs to be most strongly addressed at present is the assumption that heterosexuality is 'normal.' While many people are willing to recognize that homosexuality is a social construct, they are unable to conceive of heterosexuality as such.

In this paper, I am going to examine a number of recent telefilms and theatrical films that directly deal with homosexuality. The telefilms are: *An Early Frost* (NBC, 1985), *Consenting Adult* (ABC, 1985) and *Welcome Home Bobby* (CBS,

1985); the theatrical films are: *Desert Hearts* (US, 1986), *Parting Glances* (US, 1986), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Great Britain, 1986) and *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* (Mexico, 1985). As is well-known, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is a made-for-television product; it was given theatrical distribution after receiving an enthusiastic response at the 1985 Edinburgh Film Festival. Like the three other theatrical films mentioned above, *My Beautiful Laundrette* is considered an independent production; that is, it wasn't produced within mainstream cinema by a major production company.





*Cruising*: The gay bar (Al Pacino).

On the other hand, these films, in their Toronto engagements, were given a mainstream distribution and exhibition; but, interestingly, the films' advertisements offer no explicit indication of their content. (Actually, *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* is about to go into distribution in Toronto. Presumably, the film's advertisement campaign will be the same as the New York City campaign which was explicit about the film's gay content.)

## THE CONTEXT

**W**ITHIN THE LAST YEAR, there have been numerous programmes on North American television that contain gay or lesbian characters including the telefilm *Dress Gray* (1986) and the syndicated situation comedy *Brothers*. To an extent, then, the telefilms I will be discussing can be seen as arbitrary choices on my part. In striking contrast, since the early 1980s, mainstream cinema has pointedly avoided presentations of homosexuality. At that time, the major Hollywood studios, perhaps swayed by the North American success of *La Cage aux Folles* (1979) and/or the increasing visibility of

homosexuals and interest in their identities, produced a series of gay and lesbian themed films that included *Cruising* (1980), *Making Love* (1982), *Partners* (1982), *Personal Best* (1982) and *Victor/Victoria* (1982). With the exception of *Victor/Victoria*, which is primarily about gender-role crossing and has *Tootsie* (1982) as its companion piece, these films were neither commercial nor critical successes. *Cruising*, which I consider the most progressive of these films, aligns masculinity with the oppression of both gays and heterosexual men; additionally, it is extremely audacious in refusing to deny the relation between gays and such cultural taboos as s/m and promiscuity. The response to this audaciousness was an almost total denouncement of the film as anti-gay. Undoubtedly, many gay men rejected the film on the grounds that it reinforced heterosexuals' negative image of gays. But, from another perspective, the film can be seen as a powerful affront to the tendency to keep gay sexual practices behind closed doors. *Cruising*, it seems to me, offers a challenge to many viewers, including some gays, because the film privileges the depiction of sexual practices that heterosexuality seeks to condemn as 'unnatu-

ral.' *Making Love*, a much more cautious film, treats homosexuality as a 'social problem.' The film's primary project appears to be the display of a 'liberal' acceptance of gays; or, more precisely, the monogamous gay who is seeking domestic happiness.

*Silkwood* (1983) doesn't belong to the early 1980s cycle as the film doesn't purport to be about homosexuality. Nevertheless, it contains a major character who is a lesbian and many critics have commented on the film's 'matter-of-fact' attitude toward this character. Although the Cher character is fully-rounded, I think the film uses her 'comic' attempts to engage with the Diana Scarwid character to re-affirm the centrality of the 'dramatic' concerns of the heterosexual couple, Meryl Streep/Kurt Russell. In this counterpointing tactic, *Silkwood* is very similar to *Victor/Victoria* which constructs a parallel gay and heterosexual couple; the latter couple, of course, is given emotional and romantic precedence. More recently, *Kiss of The Spider Woman* (1985), which has a marginal relation to Hollywood cinema through the participation of William Hurt, Raul Julia and scriptwriter Leonard Schrader, can be seen as employing a variation on





*Dona Herlinda and Her Son: That not so obscure object of desire.*

this practice. Although *Kiss of The Spider Woman* has numerous positive elements, it is possible to split the film's two central protagonists into gay/comic, heterosexual/dramatic; and, significantly, the final images of the film are an envisioning of a reunion of the heterosexual couple. But, alternatively, *Kiss of The Spider Woman* relates the oppression of gays to the policies of fascism, acknowledges that gays, without political consciousness, may be complicit in their own oppression and, ultimately, presents the William Hurt character as a person capable of heroism. In contrast, *Another Country* (1984) is the inverse of *Kiss of The Spider Woman*. In the latter film, the Hurt character is redeemed through his commitment to revolutionary politics; in *Another Country*, the film's gay protagonist, played by Rupert Everett, is virtually destroyed by making such a commitment. *Another Country* never seriously carries through the parallel that it sets up between sexual politics and revolutionary politics. The film's strongest aspect is its presentation of the way in which homosexual activity is an integral but furtive aspect of the upper class British school system. And, within this particular context, the film is notable as it

depicts the Everett character refusing to accept subterfuge.

In the April 9, 1986 issue of *Variety*, the entertainment trade paper, there was a feature-length article entitled "Gay-themed Features Hot B.O. Stuff." Conceivably, in the near future the Hollywood cinema will respond to the commercial prospects of films that centrally feature homosexual character(s). On the other hand, the ever-increasing budgets of Hollywood films demand the production of films which are thought to have a mass audience appeal. While this doesn't preclude the making of mainstream films intended for a specific audience, e.g., the 'new women's cinema,' these films, like the mass audience films, are dominated by the concerns of heterosexual characters. Additionally, the Hollywood cinema has a very heavy economic investment in its stars; among other things, Hollywood star images function to reinforce the established gender identity concepts of the masculine/male and feminine/female. There is no question that star images, both on and off the screen, are less rigidly regulated than they were during the era of the studio system; and, from the 1960s onward, there has been a

flood of star autobiographies and/or biographies which usually include revelations about a particular star's illicit sexual involvements. Adding to this greater frankness, there have been recent disclosures on the homosexual tendencies of several no longer living male stars. Nevertheless, star images have been and continue to be constructed on the assumption that the general public would reject a star if it was discovered that he or she wasn't a 'real' man or woman, i.e., heterosexual. (Recently, the announcement that Rock Hudson was gay led to numerous articles on the industry's 'closet' homosexuals; but it is unlikely that this speculation will produce changes. More likely, even greater precautions will be taken to avoid the exposure of industry members who are practising homosexuals.) Any possible undermining of the heterosexual image, which includes the on-screen enactment of a homosexual, is considered to be risk-taking. As a result, Hollywood stars tend to be very cautious about appearing in gay-themed films. Since the early 1960s, when the taboo on homosexuality as subject matter was removed, the exception continues to be those projects which have a role that offers an actor a perfor-



mance challenge. Most often, these roles entail an 'excessive' characterization which results in a downplaying of the star-as-presence and highlights the star-as-actor, e.g., Marlon Brando (*Reflections in a Golden Eye*, 1967), Rod Steiger (*The Sergeant*, 1968), Richard Burton and Rex Harrison (*Staircase*, 1969), William Hurt (*Kiss of The Spider Woman*).

## THE TELEFILMS

**H**OMOSEXUALITY HAS been the subject matter of a number of telefilms since *That Certain Summer* (ABC, 1972). At that time, as Vito Russo discusses in *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), guidelines were drawn up as to the depiction of homosexuals on American television programming. Essentially, these guidelines function to ensure that a 'balanced' position is taken toward the presentation of homosexuals. Russo argues that this has made possible "... a more vibrant and diverse portrait of gay America than has been seen in the entire history of the American film." (p. 223). But, as these telefilms illustrate, homosexuality continues to be treated as a social problem; and, in particular, the threat it poses to the family unit. In the paragraphs below, I will discuss what I find to be the major elements in these telefilms. My intention is not to produce 'definitive' interpretations but, rather, to give my responses to the social concerns they are trying to negotiate.

*An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* have the same premise: a young adult son reveals to his middle class family that he is gay. In the former, Michael/Aidan Quinn also reveals that he has AIDS; and, to an extent, *An Early Frost* functions as a means to provide the viewer with information on the disease. (AIDS isn't named in either *Consenting Adult* or *Welcome Home Bobby* but, in both telefilms, the fathers, when talking about their revulsion against homosexuality, refer to gays and *that* disease they now communicate.) There are marked differences to the mother's initial response to the revelation—Kay/Gena Rowlands is hesitantly accepting whereas Tess/Marlo Thomas, in *Consenting Adult*, thinks it's impossible that her son is gay; but it is the father's response that is of primary importance in these telefilms. The father's response, in both instances, is remarkably similar: anger and disgust. On one hand, these men are presented as 'average' husband/father figures; but, on the other, there is the implication that they have over-invested in their 'masculinist' attitudes about 'manliness.' These attitudes produce hostilities toward the

gay son which, if unchecked, will destroy the family unit. In *An Early Frost*, Nick/Ben Gazzara, after saving Michael from a suicide attempt which, in part, is a response to his father's rejection, suddenly decides that "I don't want you to die." In effect, the statement acknowledges that there is a question as to whether or not no son is preferable to a gay son. Therefore, it becomes crucial that the fathers cannot continue totally to reject their son's gayness. Again, *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* are very similar in how the impending dissolution of the family is avoided. Partly, these men realize, through their wives' intervention, that they have a commitment to keep the family together whatever the crisis. But, perhaps, more importantly, it is the fact that the sons, in the climactic sequences of these telefilms, challenge the fathers' authoritative position; seemingly, in doing so, the son becomes 'some kind of a man' to his father and this allows for a degree of acceptance on the father's part of his son's gay identity.

Kay and Tess are unswervingly dedicated to their husbands and families. Nevertheless, both women are connected to tensions resulting from their embracement of these roles. In *An Early Frost*, the tension doesn't exist between Kay and Nick; instead, it is Bea/Sylvia Sidney, Kay's mother, who expresses an antagonism toward Nick and his masculinist attitudes. In addition to her dislike of his behaviour, Bea resents the marriage itself; in marrying Nick, Kay gave up a promising career as a classical pianist. On the other hand, in *Consenting Adult*, there is a tension between Tess and Ken/Martin Sheen; but it isn't presented as the product of his masculine dominance. For Tess, the tension is produced when she realizes that Ken no longer thinks of her and their relationship in sexual/romantic terms. Through inference, which includes her adamant assertion that she isn't responsible if their son is gay, Tess can be seen as worrying about her failure as a wife/mother figure. But, there is also the suggestion that Tess is beginning to suspect that she has idealized her wife/mother role. *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult* are, in different ways, providing a space in which it is possible to relate the family unit to a source of oppression to women and gays. But, as these telefilms are very much concerned with the survival of the nuclear family, it would become counter-productive to bond women and gays in a rebellion against masculinist oppression.

Neither Michael nor Jeff/Barry Tubb, the gay son in *Consenting Adult*, can be described as being marginal to the narra-

tive; but the characters' primary function is, I think, to be that of a catalyst and, also, to project a 'positive' gay role model. Although Michael has AIDS, he has not lived a promiscuous lifestyle. In fact, Michael has been living in a monogamous relationship with his lover Peter/D.W. Moffett. (After Michael's illness is diagnosed as AIDS, Peter reveals that he has had a few casual sex contacts during the two years they have been living together. Peter's motivation for these contacts was loneliness as Michael privileged his career over their relationship. Later, it is suggested that Michael most likely contracted AIDS before meeting Peter.) Similarly, at the conclusion of *Consenting Adult*, it is implied that Jeff is living in an 'exclusive' gay relationship. Michael, Peter and Jeff share many of the same traits: they are handsome, clean-cut, intelligent, sensitive and caring. On the other hand, they do not display any traits which would identify them as sissies, faggots, queers. These gays appear to be 'normal' men; hence, their integration into the family and other dominant social structures doesn't seem to be quite so impossible. Their normality/respectability is what makes them socially acceptable; it also tends to make them invisible as gays. In *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, this invisibility includes the non-existence of gay communities and the possibility of gays having recourse to emotional support from gay and non-gay friends.

*Welcome Home Bobby* employs a variation on the premise of a son's revelation to his family that he is gay. In this telefilm, Bobby/Timothy Williams, a teenager from a working class, Italian, Catholic background, has had a sexual relationship with an adult male; because of a series of complications, the relationship is exposed. When it is, Bobby is thought to be gay. Bobby, in turn, says the relationship doesn't necessarily mean that he is gay; and, furthermore, he should have the right to choose his sexual orientation. *Welcome Home Bobby* has an unwieldy narrative which is populated with many characters who are used to present differing responses to Bobby. The telefilm is also, I think, very uncertain in its treatment of homophobia, gay relations, and individual attempts to resist conformist social pressures. Given the multitude of positions the telefilm adopts, it would be impossible to elaborate on each in this paper. In any case, as in the other two telefilms under discussion, Bobby's relation with his family and particularly the father/son relationship is given precedence. Again, the father's homophobic responses are uneasily displaced onto the threat Bob-





Gordon Warnecke, Shirley Anne Field, Saeed Jaffrey in *My Beautiful Laundrette*.

by's possible gay identity poses to family unity which, it is implied, depends on the father's role as the household head. And, again, Bobby's refusal to succumb to his father's dominance, which would be admitting castration, proves him to be 'some kind of a man' by the narrative's resolution. It is, I think, important to point out that in these narratives, the father's ultimate acceptance of his son's difference doesn't dislodge his authoritative position. Rather, it suggests that the father is, in actuality, more humane than the son thought him to be.

In *Welcome Home Bobby*, Bobby's mother is a very minor character; beyond maintaining that Bobby is a good boy, she doesn't challenge her husband's initial rejection of their son. While the mother is irrelevant to the narrative, Bobby's girlfriend, Beth/Gisela Caldwell, is given considerable prominence. Essentially, she is a good girl who loves Bobby but is sickened by his 'unnatural' sexual experience. As such, she represents Bobby's other option; heterosexuality, marriage and family. At the telefilm's conclusion, Beth is still offering herself as the alternative choice Bobby has. Significantly, in contrast, Bobby's former gay lover, through a series of narrative flashbacks, has been shown to be, beneath his surface charm, an insincere, bitchy and exploitive person. While the telefilm has an 'open ending,' the choices are unbalanced.

Like the central gay characters in *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adult*, Bobby displays no characteristics which would relate him to any homosexual stereotype. *Welcome Home Bobby*, much more so

than *An Early Frost*, which features a flamboyant gay whom Michael meets in the hospital and gradually accepts as 'human,' raises the issue of the degree to which an image like the 'flaming queen' is an assault on strongly held notions of gender differences. In an extraordinary scene, Bobby, in anger over his father's rejection, comes down to the family dinner wearing long earrings, heavy make-up and a dress; employing a 'feminine' voice and gestures, he taunts his father saying this is what homosexuals are about. On the one hand, Bobby appears to be attacking his father's homophobic fears; but, on the other, the scene, through juxtaposition, reinforces Bobby's previous image as a 'normal' male. Additionally, the scene can be taken as an acknowledgement that gender roles are, indeed, just performance.

As I implied earlier, the female characters in *Welcome Home Bobby* are very traditional images of women. Beth, like Bobby's mother, relegates to the male the making of choices and decisions. In a way, it seems to me, the telefilm is reaffirming what it means to be a 'masculine male' in our society and celebrates the privileges this identity gives to the male who is 'tough enough' to take them. In response, I propose *Welcome Home Bobby* should be rewritten; in this version, the crucial change will be having a female as the central teenage character.

#### THE INDEPENDENT THEATRICAL FILMS

**I**N CONTRAST TO THE OTHER films dealt with in this paper, these films refuse to treat homo-

sexuality as 'controversial' subject matter which demands a moral and social examination. As I said, although *Silkwood* doesn't problematize homosexuality, the lesbian characters are of secondary importance and the film doesn't treat their relationship seriously. *Desert Hearts*, *Parting Glances* and *My Beautiful Laundrette* reverse the priorities; in these films, the homosexual characters and their relationships are privileged. Furthermore, the films are a delicate mixture of the comic and the dramatic allowing for a more fully-rounded conception of the characters and their situations. Here, the characters are placed within a complex social environment characterized by a whole range of problems which affect the protagonists' relationships; in the telefilms, being a homosexual is the problem, to which a generally unproblematic society has to adjust. On the other hand, *Dona Herlinda and Her Son*, taking a satirical attitude to its subject matter, mocks the concerns of the telefilms that present the intrusion of homosexuality into the nuclear family as a crisis.

With the exceptions of Jaime Humberto Hermosillo, the director of *Dona Herlinda and Her Son*, and Jane Rule, the author of the book on which *Desert Hearts* is based, the makers of these films haven't, in interviews, explicitly mentioned their sexual orientations. Nevertheless, the director of *Desert Hearts*, Donna Deitch, and the writer-director of *Parting Glances*, Bill Sherwood (who gives the impression that his gay identity is to be taken for granted) have made it clear that the films were very personal projects; both filmmakers refused to abandon their projects when confronted with seemingly insurmountable financial difficulties. Whatever their sexual orientation, these filmmakers, like Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears, respectively the writer and director of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, have shown that there is the possibility of gay cultural politics intervening in realist filmmaking practice. In particular, my concern is that these films, while not breaking with the realist mode, employ various strategies which are disruptive to certain imperatives identified with the dominant realist cinema.

For instance, *Desert Hearts* uses the generic mode of the romantic comedy—a format which has been traditionally reserved for the playing out of heterosexual relations. And, as a romantic love story, *Desert Hearts* is centrally about the relations between Vivian/Helen Shaver and Cay/Patricia Charbonneau. Although the film isn't devoid of heterosexual relations, these remain marginal.



Of these, only the relation between Silver/Ander Ankers, Cay's co-worker at a casino, and her male lover is of any consequence. While presented as loving, this relationship, unlike the Vivian/Cay relationship, is never eroticized. Indeed, the most erotic scene involving Silver is in a sequence in which she and Cay take a bath together. There is, in fact, no major heterosexual male character in the film; and neither Vivian nor Cay has an emotional commitment to a man. On the other hand, there is Frances/Audra Lindley, Cay's step-mother, who repeatedly claims that her relationship with Cay's father was totally fulfilling. But Frances' exclusive commitment to heterosexuality is presented as a limitation in contrast to Silver, who, while heterosexually orientated, is untroubled by Cay's lesbian identity. As the bath-taking scene suggests, she's able to respond to Cay with a non-sexual physical intimacy. With the Frances character, there is the implication that her exclusive heterosexuality is grounded in fear and repression. Significantly, she sees Vivian as her rival for Cay; it is Frances' jealousy over Cay's attraction to Vivian that prompts her to using 'family' as a pretext to maintain possession of her step-daughter. And, eventually, Frances, in anger over Cay's directness about her feelings toward Vivian, inadvertently acknowledges that her life with Glenn was based on an idealization of heterosexual relations that in reality were rooted in exploitation.

With Vivian, Cay, Frances and Silver as the film's major characters, it becomes virtually impossible to view *Desert Hearts* as other than being about women's identities and needs, but, more importantly, through the depiction of Vivian and Cay and their relationship, the film refuses to undercut homosexual desires and experiences. In this respect, I think the hotel room sequence, in which the two women first make love, is crucial to the film. Precisely, the film does not want to be 'tasteful' or coy about the sexual pleasure these two women are experiencing. On the other hand, the film doesn't objectify the women's bodies as the scene is photographed in medium close-up shots; the viewer is placed in a relationship of intimacy to the two women and encouraged to identify with their physical and emotional pleasure rather than view them as beautiful objects in the tradition of heterosexual pornography. In singling out this sequence, I am not suggesting that their lovemaking is given more weight than other aspects of the relationship. *Desert Hearts*, like *My Beautiful Laundrette*, is

about the discovery of sexual and emotional gratifications.

In *Women's Pictures*, Annette Kuhn mentions that a characteristic of the dominant cinema is the movement toward narrative closure. She says, "The structure of classic narratives works in such a way that stories are opened by a disruption of some equilibrium (say a murder or a disappearance) and work towards a resolution of the initial disruption, so that the resolution coincides with the end of the story" (p. 17). Narrative closure has had particular relevance to the dominant cinema in that so many of its films are centred on the construction of the heterosexual couple. While films which are primarily dealing with homosexual relations can move toward the creation of a couple, the relationship doesn't demand social confirmation. Unlike dominant cinema films, these four films do not employ strict narrative closure in the conventional sense. At the conclusion of *Desert Hearts*, Cay hesitatingly agrees to come to New York City. In the last sequence of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Johnny/Daniel Day Lewis and Omar/Gordon Warnecke are uneasily reunited with no indication of what the future will entail; and, essentially, the film offers no resolutions to any of the characters' situations. Similarly, *Parting Glances* concludes without resolving any of the relationships Michael/Richard Ganoung is involved in. *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* uses narrative closure but the film's 'happy ending' is the final ironic comment on the characters and their situation. It is logical that the endings of three of these films should be tentative, with no guarantee of permanence, since gay and lesbian relationships, which still lack any socially ratified forms comparable to heterosexual marriage, are necessarily exploratory and themselves open-ended.

*Parting Glances* is very much a film which insists on its commitment to a homosexual audience. While the film concentrates on the experiences several gays have within a 24 hour period, it is equally about the broader issues of gay lifestyles, gay community and gay history. In total contrast to the three telefilms previously discussed, *Parting Glances* places its central characters within a complex but generally supportive community that contains both gays and non-gays; and, in regard to its gay members, the community includes a wide range of social types. (For a more detailed discussion of types and stereotyping, see Richard Dyer's insightful essay "Stereotyping," *Gays and Film*, BFI, 1977.) In *Parting Glances*, Michael is the film's

pivotal character; essentially, it is the depiction of his relationships that advances the narrative. Michael's relations can be characterized as 'open' in that he is able to sustain a loving relationship with more than one man and is not averse to more tentative or casual relations. In strong contrast to the norm of heterosexual marriage, the film suggests that 'commitment' is not necessarily synonymous with exclusivity.

Although I think that *Desert Hearts*, *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* have a similar commitment to homosexuals, *Parting Glances* is the most resistant to heterosexual appropriation. Significantly, *Parting Glances* has had the most limited commercial success. (I am comparing its box-office performance to that of *Desert Hearts* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* is just beginning to receive theatrical distribution in North America.) In contrast, *My Beautiful Laundrette* has had the greatest commercial success and this is understandable given the possible interpretations of its subject matter. *My Beautiful Laundrette* can be seen as a film which is primarily about racial tensions in contemporary England; for the bourgeois audience, the homosexual relationship between Johnny the 'Punk' and Omar the Pakistani lends itself to the exotic rather than inviting direct identification. Consequently, homosexual desire can exist for the liberal-minded viewer without being directly threatening. But, simultaneously, the film can be seen as being primarily about two gay men who, despite overwhelming obstacles, manage to express their desire and love for each other. Beyond its surface appearance of toughness and cynicism, the film displays an intense romanticism towards its gay lovers. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Johnny is an ex-Fascist, ex-racist and Omar gradually becomes an aspiring entrepreneur; but the finest potential qualities of both are brought out by their commitment to each other. In this respect, the film takes up the concept of redemption through love with both of the characters being improved through the relationship. What is striking about the film is its refusal to 'idealize' their mutual commitment by separating it from the erotic. In visual terms, the highly charged lovemaking scenes ably convey the sensual pleasure they receive through intimate physical contact; and, crucially, Johnny, when Tania/Rita

OPPOSITE—*Parting Glances*: The male couple (above). *My Beautiful Laundrette*: Themes of race, class, sexuality (below).







Wolf asks him to leave Omar and go away with her, replies, "You haven't touched him."

Unlike the other three theatrical films, *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* is expressly concerned with gay identity within the bourgeois-patriarchal family unit. As such, *Dona Herlinda and Her Son* bears comparison to the telefilms. In contrast to the telefilms which are centred on the upheavals the introduction of homosexuality produces within the family and particularly the threat it poses to the father's masculinity, the film is devoid of a father-son relationship. Instead, the family head is, as the film's title suggests, Dona Herlinda, who is a widow; in the tradition of the culture, she is a somewhat over-bearing matriarchal figure who commands the respect and devotion of her son. And Rodolfo/Marco Antonio Trevino, as a loving son, does just as his mother wishes. Dona Herlinda/Guadalupe del Toro admits to no awareness that her son and Ramon/Arturo Meza are lovers; but, through various strategic manipulations of his relationships, she manages to satisfy Rodolfo's needs. At the same time, Dona Herlinda satisfies her own wishes. On the

one hand, she negotiates the introduction of Ramon into the family household; on the other, she negotiates her son's marriage to a woman of their social position who is both intelligent and emancipated. By the end of the film, everyone appears to have what she or he wants. Dona Herlinda retains control of her son, maintains social respectability and has the assurance of the continuation of the family lineage; the wife intends to pursue her political studies in Germany for a year, leaving Rodolfo and Ramon to raise the baby and continue their relationship. The film suggests that the complicity of the liberated wife and the gay lover may contain the seeds for the future disruption of the patriarchal order; but, meanwhile, the film's last shot has Dona Herlinda smiling benevolently and victoriously at the viewer as her son is heard praising her.

The film is an object lesson, at once affectionate and ironical, on how homosexuality can be accommodated within a repressive society. In *Dona Herlinda and Her Son*, homosexuality is incorporated into the patriarchal family without ever being acknowledged for what it is.

In this paper, I am not trying to present closed statements on either the telefilms or the independent theatrical features, all of which raise issues that need to be explored in greater detail. What can be clearly asserted is that while the telefilms remain locked within the ideology of the family and traditional relationships, the independent theatrical films push beyond this, not merely to produce more progressive images of gay and lesbian life, but to suggest potentialities for new and more exploratory forms of human relationship. □



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Vincente Minnelli, 1957

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*Back cover: Joan Bennett*



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